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BY

LADY EASTLAKE

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

IN VENTURING to reprint in a separate form (permission having been kindly granted) the following Essays, originally contributed to the 'Edinburgh' and 'Quarterly' Reviews, the writer founds her claim to the indulgence of the reader on no study or thought of her own, but solely on the advantages enjoyed by her for long years at the side of the late Sir Charles L. Eastlake.

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LEONARDO DA VINCI

LEONARDO DA VINCI.

WHAT history is there of Christian times which presents such endless sources of thought to the philosopher, such glorious visions of art and beauty to the man of taste, such mournful wonderment to the moralist, such insoluble enigmas to all, as the history of Italy towards the end of the fifteenth and during the sixteenth centuries? Seen by the light of subsequent times, there are few things in the history of this world so painful as the contrast between the glory of her apogee and the completeness of her eclipse—between the pride of her height and the humiliation of her fall—between the splendour of one side of the picture and the darkness of its reverse. The lowness of the level at which she lay—attrac-

tive, whether to friend or foe, to spoiler or admirer, only for the trophies of her past, and receiving at length the most contemptuous appellation by which a country can be defined, that of 'a mere geographical expression'—this was for fully three centuries, and down to our own time, the history of Italy. All inquiry, therefore, resolves itself into the question of the soundness of her previous prosperity; and no one can pursue the lives and careers of any of her grand and gifted children within that epoch without perceiving at every turn the deep hollowness which underlay Italian society at the very time when its surface was most brilliant. The reasons for such corruption and collapse were doubtless owing mainly to the virtual absence of the vital functions of a nation's health, and to the interruption of such as had supplied their place. For that consciousness of a common country which the word 'nation' implies, had never been in one sense the bond of the Italian race; while, towards the close of the fifteenth century, the spirit of local independ-

ence which had ensured the prosperity of her small states was rapidly becoming extinguished. Small republics, however internally wise and secure for a period, had never formed a nation; and, as the stronger coveted and obtained dominion over the weaker—as Florence over Pisa—and they in their turn yielded to usurpers from within or without, the conception of a common patriotism, as of a common strength, ceased even on this limited scale to exist. That a sturdy patriotism still survived in a few lofty minds who struggled and suffered in vain—a line never extinct even in her darkest hours—is one of the most touching features of this period of degradation. But a significant and most mournful sign of the decay of 'rich and royal Italy' was the fact that the majority of her children ceased not to be gay and happy even in her degradation. Nothing strikes us more than the enjoyment of life and the activity of art and letters at a time and under conditions which must have filled a loyal and thoughtful heart with the gravest forebodings. For

while the soil of Italy can produce, as it has never ceased to do, the noblest and most vigorous specimens of the human plant, her sun has also fostered the most base and corrupt. Bondage, dependence, and servility are as potent for the development of evil as liberty for that of good. If we can imagine the light of our English freedom suddenly quenched, no result would be sadder to behold than the number and the class of minds who would accommodate themselves to the degrading conditions, and find, as the Italians did, some congenial sunshine to live and flourish, to bask and buzz in. It is indeed but just to the Italian race to confess—what was evident to many even before their present revival, and will not be disputed now—that any other European nation, once fallen so low, would have exhibited greater brutalisation of life and manners, though not perhaps the same effeminacy and demoralisation.

There were, however, secondary reasons for the indifference with which, towards the

close of the fifteenth century, signs of approaching evil were regarded—and reasons more immediately perceptible and traceable. These lay partially in the nature of the letters then cultivated, as well as in the exclusive interest with which they were pursued. The brilliant epoch of the study of classic authors which ensued on the dispersion of ancient manuscripts in Italy, consequent on the taking of Constantinople by the Turks (1453); the ardour with which the various centres of Italy and her most learned men vied with each other in classic interpretation and research—all this, further promoted by the discovery of the art of printing, and hailed at the time by some thoughtful minds as an antidote to the prevailing ambition, profligacy, and avarice, had its deeply injurious effect on what we should now call the public welfare—the remedy ultimately aggravating the disease. Without the active principle of national and political life such studies were entrancing and benumbing, like the paradise of the lotus-eaters. Men occupied

with disputes and discussions, however polite and graceful, on the literature of a dead Past, were readily diverted from the questions of a living Present. Minds absorbed in the restoration of ancient letters, and in the fancied revival of a Platonic philosophy, were least likely to miss the atmosphere of political liberty or of religious consistency. Palaces and gardens were used as places of debate on questions in which we now fail to see any practical utility. '*Accademie*' were the order of the day, and unproductive pedantries were the consequence of such Academies. A fictitious activity and real licence in topics worthless to a State took the place of all higher exercise of freedom, and the literary erudition which raised more than one Pontiff to the Papal throne has hardly bequeathed a thought beneficial to the human race. 'Beaucoup de beaux ouvrages, et peu de belles actions illustraient l'Italie : et tandis qu'on trouvait chez les érudits tant d'ardeur et de persévérance dans le travail, on trouvait peu de caractère chez les magistrats, peu de

courage chez les guerriers, peu de patriotisme chez les citoyens.' [1]

There was one great reality, however, surviving all those by which Italy had led the van before every other nation in Europe—a reality never more grand and splendid than at the period we are considering—which has bequeathed monuments of national genius unequalled since, and in virtue of which she remains a lawgiver to the present day. This reality was her Art. In this form of national life Italy continued, even to the end of the sixteenth century, to be a great country, and her artists true patriots, for they endowed her with that which must ever excite the emulation and admiration of all really refined peoples. No careers more surely reflect the salient characteristics and social standards of a race than those of the children of Art. The painter is himself an *objet de luxe.* He germinates—a divinely dropt seed—only where the soil has ripened into the requisite richness to

[1] Sismondi's *Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Age*, vol. v., p. 290.

bear him. He is a superfluity which thrives only where there is the demand, no matter what its nature—superstition, vanity, or taste—for the fruits of his pencil. He flourishes finally in courts and high places only where society has reached that culmination of a real or seeming prosperity, when the great and wealthy of the earth, sated with or secure of other pleasures, stretch forth their hands to grasp those intellectual excitements to which genius alone can minister. The painter, therefore, is, in a certain sense, the sure thermometer of the atmosphere which he breathes; but he lives, or can live, in an atmosphere where higher things are stifled. For his inspiration is not injured by causes which mortally affect the man of moral or patriotic aims. Certain conditions there are which minister to his vocation; and these conditions—viz. a glorious climate, noble types in man and nature, a sensuous worship, and a luxurious society—no country ever possessed in greater perfection than the Italy of the *cinque cento.*

From Science, in the higher sense, the Italian painter had no rivalism to fear. May it not be accepted as an axiom that the Church which utilises Art as an auxiliary to the extent employed by the Papal hierarchy, will never tolerate the sterner sister? Such science as would help to destroy life, or animate an automaton, was readily welcomed, but he who ventured to assert that the earth revolved on her axis, and he who denounced the sale of indulgences, stood in the same condemned category at the court of Rome.

It would, however, be a grave mistake to infer that Italian Art in the person of her votaries received the same tribute of respect and sympathy now paid to artists in our less gifted times—a tribute becoming perhaps both indiscriminate and excessive, paid rather to the intellectual rank with which the great Italian masters have endowed the idea of the painter's vocation than to the abstract value of Art. Partaking of the condition of a labourer in the service of the Church, the artist of the fifteenth century was, in that

capacity, equally controlled and dictated to. High-flown conceptions of the deference paid to the painter, to his sensitive nature and his capricious inspiration, are soon overturned if we examine the estimates and contracts between himself and the chapters of churches and superiors of convents; little differing in rigorous matter-of-fact stipulations from those we nowadays conclude with carpenter or mason. Nor was an appeal to taste so much as an item in the bargain; for the gratification of taste was neither the object of the Church nor the requirement of the Faithful. Such 'opinions of the Press,' too, as existed at the time were not calculated to enlighten or encourage the man of acutely sensitive calibre. It would be difficult to find writings more dull and pedantic, and less cognizant of the real philosophy and true sphere of art than those which were penned in presence of the best glories of the *cinque cento*. No Italian work, indeed, has descended to us of the slightest value to the painter, as distinguished from the mere historical student of

Art, excepting always 'Vasari's Lives,' which, however inaccurate and puerile, have sometimes the value of a genuinely professional criticism.

In all this there was the greater proof of the genius of the artist and of the triumph of Art—too healthy in her instincts and certain in her processes to be affected by conditions, however unsympathetic, tyrannical, and even prohibitory they would now be pronounced. Our modern standard, therefore, of the claims of the craft to peculiar exemptions and privileges suffers great change when we track the course of Italian Art from its rise to its culmination. First, hailed as a new wonder which the vulgar and marvel-loving ran in crowds to see; then employed and incorporated as a regular handicraft in the service of the Church; next, exalted or neglected, competed for or dismissed, petted or insulted, as the whim, vanity, superstition, or intrigue, full or empty exchequer of pontiff or prince dictated; her own votaries, meanwhile, partaking of all the complexion of the period—a

race glorious and gifted, yet most of them what we now feel to be creatures of childish habits—with the passions of men and the follies of children—fighting and quarrelling, maiming and murdering, destroying their own works from pique, and their neighbours' from jealousy,—Art, for all that, is seen to hold on her course unfaltering; never making a false step, never undoing what she had once done; till who shall say what agencies could then have retarded her, and what would since have restored her; whence she comes, and why she goes?

Three great men in Italy stood highest in the ranks of Art at the highest time of her seeming greatness; closely connected in experience, widely separated in individual character, each showing in various degrees the extraordinary gifts which, in some form, have never died out from the Italian race—all equally affected by the manners and policy of the age; all 'mighty men.' These three were Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Raphael. To be a great artist was by

that time a passport both to employment and to popularity. The world had then begun to seek them for themselves as well as for their art. Society had reached that intellectual point when genius is not only patronised but prized. No one of these three great men were bound by convent rules or fettered by partnerships; each stood individual and alone, though drawing numbers round them. The outline of their characters, therefore, is lost in no common ground; and no thread of history is more trustworthy to follow than the lives and fates of such men. Two of them, Leonardo and Michael Angelo, were before and beyond their age—the one intellectually, the other morally; while Raphael in both respects stood on a par with it. Leonardo and Raphael were men of the world, supple, courtier-like, swimming with the stream; Michael Angelo was stern and upright, and always in conflict with it. Leonardo was the greater genius; Michael Angelo the nobler spirit; Raphael the happier man. Of one so sympathetic and successful as Raphael it

is difficult to give a telling outline. Misfortune did not try him, success did not spoil him, length of life did not weary him; accordingly the course of the man and of the painter presents that smoothness on which the moralist can lay little hold. Leonardo's gifts, on the other hand, were so incredibly numerous and varied as to hinder the development of his career in any one of them; he was also fastidious, procrastinating, and apparently unconscientious; and never was so lofty a fame in art maintained by works so few, so ruined, and so uncertain as those he has left behind him. Michael Angelo was the impersonation of laboriousness and conscientiousness, but his time and his genius were wasted by the authority of ignorance and caprice; and it was only by the perseverance of an honest purpose, the energy of a great mind, and the opportunity of a long life that he accomplished the stupendous monuments that immortalise him. As to Raphael, the number of his creations, as compared with the shortness of his career, are

such as lead us to infer that equal facility and perfection of production, never compatible before or since. Leonardo worked slowly; Michael Angelo furiously; of Raphael's mode of labour we can only be sure that it was a delight to him. In character of art Leonardo and Michael Angelo were both strictly new; Raphael not so new as so perfect. Finally, their portraits are the types of the men. Leonardo, handsome and high-bred, with an Italian's dignity, but a courtier's mask; Raphael, young, beautiful, and unruffled; Michael Angelo's, the mournfullest countenance we can look upon.

We select for brief analysis the earlier and foremost of the three, the man of the '*natura incontentabile*,' as termed by his biographer Manzi; 'the first name of the fifteenth century,' according to Hallam. Hitherto the life of Leonardo da Vinci has inspired the sense of a subject worn threadbare equally from lack of material and from reiteration. Meanwhile there has been a growing consciousness of the importance of all he thought

as well as did, and of the necessity for a more systematic study of his multiform remains. This demand has been now in great measure supplied by the labour of Dr. J. P. Richter in his recently published work,[1] in which the scattered writings of this extraordinary man, given in double columns—original and translation—are for the first time collated and classified. Most of the drawings also here produced in fac-simile had never been published before. These volumes may be said to exhaust the literary side of Leonardo's career, though nothing can exhaust its suggestiveness. Second only to this in importance is the fine work, which on occasion of the inauguration of the monument erected to him at Milan, and of the exhibition of works of the Leonardesque school, in the same city, in 1872, was published by the Government of Italy, only three hundred copies having been printed.[2]

[1] The literary works of Leonardo da Vinci, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, Ph.Dr. In two volumes. London, 1883.

[2] Saggio delle opere di Leonardo da Vinci, con venti quattro Tavole fotolito grafiche di Scritture e Disegni tratti

This work was edited by a commission, with Count Belgioioso at the head, and contains expositions of the great master's varied forms of art, science, and literature, by competent hands; with photographs, the size of the originals, from sketches of various kinds, and especially from his magnificent hydraulic drawings. These are all selected from the enormous volume called the 'Codice Atlantico,'[1] preserved in the Ambrogian Library. For the present the Italian Government have made no demand for the restitution of the twelve volumes of Leonardo's MSS. which were detained by the French, or rather neglected to be claimed by the Austrians, in 1815, and are still in the library of the Institut at Paris; but for a thorough investigation of Leonardo's labours these may be said to be indispensable; and the time may be hoped for when their reinstatement

del Codice Atlantico. Milano, 1872. Edizione di 300 Exemplari.

[1] So called from the size of the paper on which the MSS. and drawings are mounted—Carta Atlantica—corresponding with our imperial folio.

in the Ambrogian Library will do honour to both nations.

An English work was also compiled by a lady in 1874,[1] giving much that had previously been published on the life and works of the great master; including, it must be owned, anecdotes and conclusions long disproved, and lacking also the discriminating criticism requisite in such an undertaking.

Leonardo da Vinci came into the world close upon the time when Fra Angelico left it. The art that the one took up is curious to compare with that which the other laid down; yet, in one sense, the younger painter was the natural heir to the elder; for Fra Angelico was the first to develop that quality in art—expression—which Leonardo carried to its utmost perfection. Leonardo was illegitimate and left-handed, but neither proved a bar to his progress, either sinister or otherwise. He

[1] Leonardo da Vinci and his works: consisting of a life of Leonardo da Vinci, by Mrs. Chas. W. Heaton; an Essay on his Scientific and Literary Works, by Chas. Christopher Black, M.A., and an account of his most important paintings. London 1874.

was born in 1452, at Vinci, in the Val d'Arno, when his father, Piero da Vinci, was twenty-five years of age; who in the same year married the first of his four wives, from not one of whom did Leonardo derive his birth, his mother being a certain Caterina, afterwards married to Accattabriga di Piero della Vacca, also of Vinci. Piero da Vinci had no children by his first two wives, but a numerous family—eight sons and three daughters—by his third and fourth wife, the eldest of whom, a daughter, was not born till 1476. When, therefore, Mrs. Heaton, like most of her forerunners on this topic, dwells on the fact of Leonardo's having been educated in his father's family on a level in point of affection and advantages with the legitimate offspring, she overlooks the chronology which her own work supplies; which shows us that Leonardo was well flown from the parent nest by the time the others began to occupy it, being twenty-seven years of age before his eldest half-brother, Giuliano—born 1479—appeared on the scene. It is not surprising, therefore,

that, so long an only child in his father's house, and illegitimacy, as is well known, then no brand, he should have received that nurture and education which his abilities warranted. For the youthful promise of such genius could admit of no mistake. The inquiring mind which stamps the future man of science—the observing eye which heralds proficiency in art—the mathematical and logical head, indispensable for the natural philosopher; in all these—unlike the poetic, dreamy temperament which often lies dormant, and apparently dull, in early years—the boy we may be sure was father of the man. To mental gifts were further added a splendid person, activity and ardour in every manly sport—the varied accomplishments of a dancer, a musician, an improvisatore, and a poet—with a spirit which delighted in mastering the wildest horse, and a strength that could bend the animal's shoe. It may be questioned whether the love of natural science did not predominate in the restless young brain—whether a chemist's laboratory, or an

engineer's office, would not nowadays have received him. But the world was in the infancy of science; it was in the maturity of art. Science was then a suspicious occupation; art, a profitable one; and the art of that time covered a far greater area of intellectual ground than it does now. At all events, the father showed his discrimination by apprenticing the young lad to the distinguished Florentine artist, Andrea Cione, called Verocchio.

It has been usual to depreciate the merit of this master in order, unnecessarily, to exalt that of his scholar. But the familiar appellation of '*Verocchio*,' or the true eye, implies that quality for which Leonardo became most famed, and which it is fair to believe the teacher contributed to form. In other respects, too, Verocchio occupies that stage which led upwards to Leonardo. He was not only sculptor, goldsmith, carver, and painter, but also a student of perspective and a musician. Such pictures as he may have left are merged doubtless in the common

character of the school, while his drawings are difficult to distinguish from those of Leonardo himself. In addition to these acquirements his nature was gracious and noble. For no tribute bears less the stamp of the mere flattery of the age, than that paid to him by Giovanni Santi, father of Raphael, in his 'Cronaca.'

> Il chiaro fonte
> D' umanitate e innata gentilezza,
> Che alla pittura, e alla scultura è un ponte
> Sopra del qual si passa cum destrezza,
> Dico ANDREA DA VEROCCHIO.

A man of this order was not likely to forswear the art of painting because a young pupil bade fair to excel him. Vasari's story to this effect has also that stamp of puerile gossip, which throws a doubt on many of his statements, and distinguishes those which have at present been proved to be untrue. Were it not that the figure of the angel in the 'Baptism,' by Verocchio, reported to be by the hand of the young Leonardo, differs somewhat in technical execution from the

rest, its superior attractiveness, considering the damaged state of the whole, would hardly sustain the assertion of a different pencil. It is also now known that Leonardo remained in Verocchio's studio till he was twenty-five years of age, a position quite incompatible with any theory of jealousy on the master's part. In all early accounts of the great painters we must allow for that exaggeration and love of the marvellous which characterised the time. Still, the story of the 'Rotella di fico,' as told by Vasari, is too indicative of the extraordinary lad, besides being the only record of an early work, not to be noted. It runs thus :—A countryman living near Vinci, having sawed a circular slice of wood from a fig tree, brought it to Leonardo's father, requesting him to persuade his son to paint it for a shield of arms. Leonardo took the wood, and forthwith collected in a room set apart for himself a number of flying and creeping creatures—serpents, lizards, hedgehogs, bats, locusts, beetles, dragon-flies, &c., and arranged them so as to form the sem-

blance of a hideous monster. When his father was admitted into the room, which meanwhile reeked with a '*fetor mortal*,' he drew back in horror; but whether from believing the apparition true, as Vasari avers, or as much from the appeal to another sense, the reader may decide: also whether such a father would 'secretly sell' his son's performance, and further, for 100 ducats;[1] that sum being more than three times as much as Michael Angelo received for his 'Cupid.' However that may be, there is more revealed of the lad's character by this story than would at first appear. For this was not a form of art known then. He had seen nothing of the kind. No illustrations of such orders of creation had ever been attempted by any painter. The illuminated manuscripts before that time were bordered with flowers, intermixed occasionally with a grotesque creature; but these had little affinity with the realities painted on the Rotella, and were

[1] Equivalent in the Florentine money of the time to about 26*l.*

also not likely to have come within the reach of a boy in an obscure village. We therefore perceive here, at the outset of his career, that ardent and instinctive reference to Nature which he afterwards practised and preached; and which in all his scientific researches placed him in advance of an age bigotedly devoted to tradition; always looking backward while he looked forward. The 'Medusa Head,' also in the Uffizi, which, if not by him, is unquestionably from an original by his hand, and presumably of an early date, is another instance of that application of real reptile forms to the purposes of art of which no indication is seen in the art of his predecessors.

Nor is there any proof in the description of this fantastic picture, which has vanished from sight, of the imagination so lavishly imputed to him. To make up a monster by putting together specimens of various tribes of animals, is no more imagination than to group different orders of flowers on one stalk. It would be difficult to define the meaning of

that much-taken-in-vain word, 'imagination,' as applied to an art which derives all teaching and materials from positive forms, and permits but scantily of any departure from them; but, at all events, it may be averred that, however directed in arrangement of his subject by that feeling for *selection* which marks the true artist, the young lad did not trace an outline or place a tone, strange and weird as each might be, without the most inflexible reference to his uncomfortable ménagerie. The devotion to the Actual and to the True in that sense, which was the creed of this extraordinary man, is rather antagonistic than favourable to the imaginative faculty. At the same time it is the real clue by which we can better comprehend him. For the distinction between him and other painters, ancient or modern, consists not in any greater possession on his part of those poetic and subjective instincts which approach the sphere of the imagination, but in his stricter respect for the laws and facts of nature, and his deeper study of them.

Here may equally be traced the causes for his superiority, and the causes for his strange shortcomings—for the fragments of pictures, equally as for the pictures never executed at all—the puzzle and disappointment of those who judge what he could have done by what he did do. With a mind in which the positive predominated over the imaginative, the natural result was that he applied the methods of science to the practice of art. He observed, investigated, and analysed, as if each work he undertook were a new experiment. Governed by this spirit, his mode of execution was slow, tentative, and unenjoyable. He lacked the power which generally accompanies the æsthetic order of mind, that of feeling when the idea, however imperfectly, is fulfilled—the feeling, therefore, of knowing where to stop. And he lacked it evidently more and more as he advanced in life. Hence the unfinished pictures, abandoned from the impossibility of satisfying himself, and hence, too, what may be called the over-finished pictures, injured by attempts

to come closer to positive effects of nature than can be accomplished by human art. To these M. Clément may be believed to refer when he speaks of an 'exactitude qui approche parfois à la puérilité.' [1]

To this tendency also must be attributed that vein of caricature—utterly opposed as it is to the instincts of an imaginative and idealising mind—which, viewing him as a painter only, is disturbing and repugnant in his art career. He loved, it would seem, not only to dwell on Nature's laws, but on her freaks and deformities. His writings abound to excess with definitions of the proportions and measurement of the human head as well as body, and of every limb of the body; yet he evidently took equal pleasure in endeavouring to ascertain how far Nature could depart from the average forms of beauty and symmetry without absolutely obliterating the stamp of humanity. It was his aim, it is

[1] Michel Ange, Léonard da Vinci, Raphael. Par Charles Clément, avec une étude sur l'art en Italie avant le XVIème. Siècle. Paris, 1861.

said, to define the different kinds of feature and expression possible in man. His caricatures accordingly may all be classified under different types—exaggerated to the utmost—of human character; conceit, apathy, ignorance, stupidity, insolence, vulgarity, &c. Yet even whilst sounding the most hideous depths of masculine brutality or feminine inanity, in those he calls '*Gente poco obbligata alla Natura*' he preserves a precision and delicacy of line which marks them—as may especially be seen in the photographed specimens given in the work published by the Italian Government—as the eccentricities of a master-hand. It is not easy, therefore, to believe in the group of 'Three Caricature Heads,'[1] ostensibly from a drawing in the Pitti, which Mrs. Heaton has included among her illustrations of the master's art. These are marked by outlines as coarse as

[1] This plate, and one of a female profile, the outline of which has evidently been gone over by an unintelligent hand, are unworthy of introduction in a Life of Leonardo. Other plates from well-known Luini's have at all events the excuse of being agreeable.

the forms are ill-drawn, reminding one of some bad imitator of Quentyn Matsys' 'Misers;' Leonardo, even in his vagaries, was like no one but himself.

It was not, as Mrs. Heaton avers, that Leonardo 'could never walk in the beaten paths of art, but was ever seeking some bye-way of his own—some new path in the great wilderness.' No great man ever does walk, in one sense, in the beaten paths. But this alone would not account either for his monstrosities or his beauties. We may quote words from his own pen which are a better clue to both. 'Who ever flatters himself that he can retain in his memory all the effects of Nature is deceived, for our memory is not so capacious; therefore *consult Nature for everything.*' This is an axiom absolutely true for purposes of science, but only with a certain limit for those of art. And that limit lies between the permanent truths and the accidental appearances of Nature. The authoress in question is unfortunate in instancing, *à propos* of this sentence, our

greatest modern landscape painter as 'involved and enigmatical' in his instructions, in contradistinction to Leonardo. No one who knew Turner's small vocabulary, but golden precepts, will endorse that. Still, it is true that Turner, in a particular sense, gave advice of an opposite kind. His precept was, 'Be not slavish to mere facts, but fill your eye and memory with a scene, and go home and do it.' And on this he acted. Such a system of course presupposes both eye and hand already so formed on the study of Nature, and so familiar with her purer language, as to winnow away the chaff of accident and retain only the grain of truth. The tendency of English art since Turner, has been, it may be added in one particular respect, our great painter's best vindication.

It is not for pigmies such as we to say that the great Florentine himself erred in that direction, or even to pronounce what his words, literally, mean. Language is ambiguous when applied to the art which addresses itself to the eye. And these

words by Leonardo which we have underlined are not without a seeming contradiction from his own pen. For he also advises his pupils to observe what he admits to be 'petty in practice, and almost worthy of derision,' namely, the stains on old walls, and the veins in jasper stones, as suggesting representations of landscape, confusions of battles, capricious expressions in heads, and 'other things without end;' further illustrating his meaning by instancing 'the sound of bells; in which you can hear what you please.'[1] At the same time he blames Sandro Botticelli—who, reasoning inversely, declared that one needed only to throw a sponge filled with various colours against a wall to produce the effect of a landscape—as having produced '*tristissimi paesi*.' In this latitude as to what he said, we must hold fast by what he did. And nothing is more patent than that Leonardo did not consult Nature, nor even old walls, for his backgrounds and landscapes, where dark and dismal caverns with pendent stalac-

[1] Trattato, cap. xvi.

tites, and impossible, sublimated mountains —half iceberg, half dolomite—offer features *tristissimi* in proportion as they are unnatural.

On the other hand, with his perfect veracity, where the subject attracted him, we may be sure that that which was Leonardo's alone—viz. the exquisite expression in certain female heads—suggesting 'the belief in a perfection greater than this world contains'—was no creation of his fancy, but a reality he strictly copied. And this grace—not beyond the reach of art—was not so much snatched by leaving 'the beaten path' as by pursuing that of Expression to its utmost limit. For it was there he found the flower he alone first plucked, namely, that ineffable smile which is the culminating expansion of a lovely face, and in the representation of which—except by Luini and Correggio—he has remained unapproachable.[1] The marvel is that one

[1] Vasari mentions Leonardo's having modelled laughing female and infantine heads in terra-cotta and wax while in Verocchio's studio. None, however, have survived to prove the tale true.

and the same man should have compassed and taken pleasure in the opposite poles of the beautiful and the hideous, which in his sketches sometimes occur on the same page. But in Leonardo's extraordinary mind there was common ground, as we have endeavoured to show, for both.

Too little is known of the master's early doings in Florence to give any connected chain of his life. He is believed not to have quitted Verocchio till 1477—then twenty-five years of age—and to have set up a *bottega* for himself. Nor can it positively be pronounced which of his few known, or supposed, works belong to this period. It is a mere matter of conjecture, therefore, whether the unfinished 'Adoration of the Kings' in the Uffizi, Lord Suffolk's Madonna, now in the National Gallery, and the fresco at S. Onofrio, Rome, were executed in this first Florentine time, or years later. In this uncertainty the sweet expression of his female heads (to which we have alluded), the languid, longing, high-bred smile of his Louvre Virgin on the

lap of St. Anna [1]—the attribute of the Milanese beauties, and therefore not presented to his gaze till he had left Florence—may be taken as a guide. There is an expression, too, in his children's heads—a solemn, infantine pathos—surpassing in touching beauty the work of any painter before or since, and the more marvellous because accompanied by an amount of finish in which the subtle essence of such fragrance is apt to escape. Both these expressions become a date, and they are unmistakably present in Lord Suffolk's picture. On the other hand, the unfinished 'Adoration,' however interesting to connoisseurs, and especially to painters, cannot be said to show the peculiar Leonardesque charm. The fact also that the S. Onofrio Madonna is his only genuine fresco, bespeaks an early visit to Rome, for nothing is better known than that Leonardo repudiated, to the

[1] This peculiar and unattractive arrangement of the figures was no invention by Leonardo, but a group traditional in the Roman Church to show the three generations of the 'Sacred Family,' and is seen in Germany, in early painted figures in wood, and in other forms.

world's great loss, all operations in genuine fresco later in life. For these reasons such works may be assigned to the period preceding his removal to Milan. It appears, however, from Dr. Richter's researches, that no authentic information as to Leonardo's life from 1482 to 1486 has been recovered from the past. Drafts of letters by him to the Governor of Syria, which have been the subject of much conjecture, speak of a residence in the East, and namely in Armenia during that interval, but at present no evidence has appeared to throw light on these strange documents. There are also isolated paragraphs in the enormous collection of his writings which speak of an intended journey from Rome to Naples, and another which describes engineering work executed by him in the Frinli, on both of which points nothing further is known.

In the absence, therefore, of all historical records, the later biographers of Leonardo have been left to wonder why Leonardo should have exchanged the superior art-at-

mosphere of Florence for that of Milan, or rather why, in Mrs. Heaton's words, Lorenzo de' Medici, 'quick-sighted as he was for genius, did not seek to attach such a man as this to himself. He surely must have been aware of Leonardo's powers, but for some reason or other he was unheedful of them, and suffered the brightest of the stars around him to wander into another system. It is not difficult to surmise the reasons that may have led to Leonardo desiring to quit Florence. The strange neglect of the Medici (he does not seem to have had a single commission from any one of them) would tend to show that he was not properly appreciated in his native city. Added to this, there may have been family difficulties, money matters, and what not, to induce a desire for change.'[1] All this amiable speculation is best answered by a reference to dates, which immediately dispose of the question of the absence of patronage on the part of the earlier Medici—Leonardo being but twelve years of age when

[1] Life of Leo. da Vinci, by Mrs. Chas. Heaton, p. 9.

Cosmo died. Nor is the 'neglect' of him by Lorenzo, whose mind was of a class little likely to appreciate that of Verocchio's youthful scholar, more difficult to account for. Lorenzo's character and life were of that order which, however popular in his own age, is not calculated to stand the colder analysis of our own. He inherited a lustre from old Cosmo which clung to him even while transgressing all the wise policy which had made the Medici name great. He was young, and may have been brave—he played at poetry and philosophy—he possessed all the systematic address of the period, and he gathered round him, and salaried—with money belonging to the State—too many men of letters not to be extolled alternately as the Augustus and Mæcenas of modern Italy. Viewed, however, apart from this halo of contemporary flattery, Lorenzo de' Medici appears as the arch-representative of the unreality of the time—the chief agent of the decay of the Florentine Republic—the patron of the profitless erudition—the founder of the Platonic

Academy—the giver and encourager of fêtes and follies; and setting aside more serious misdeeds, the promoter of all the hollow magnificence which disguised his spendthrift government and masked his ambitious designs. Such a man was little likely to take interest, except for passing amusement, in those scientific instincts in the mind of Leonardo, of which it has required centuries to prove and recognise the true value. Then, as to patronising his art, there is no such proof of Lorenzo's patronage of other painters as to make his omission of Leonardo singular. It would be a great mistake to suppose that the Medici of the fifteenth century had any share in the formation of the picture galleries which now adorn Florence. The idea even of such collections did not exist—far less of their public nature. It is known that the first Grand Dukes of Tuscany—at the end of the sixteenth century—made the rooms of the Uffizi the storehouse of collections of armour, astrological instruments, and natural history—of antique gems, some sculpture and

a few pictures—also that a great diamond was placed in the apartment now called the Tribune; but the chief collection of paintings was derived from the heiress of the Della Rovere family, who married the Grand Duke Ferdinand II. in 1634. To return, however, to Lorenzo de' Medici: he shared in the fashion for collecting gems and intagli, and also specimens of antique sculpture; but this taste had far less to do with the merits of such objects in the light of art, than with their incidental value as illustrations of the classic subjects then in vogue. At all events, there is no record of his having individually given a commission to a single painter. Sandro Botticelli's fine picture of the Medici family kneeling before the Madonna in the 'Adoration of the Kings' in the Uffizi, was painted before old Cosmo's death. Their portraits, with other Florentine magnates, were introduced by Ghirlandajo in the frescoes of the Sassetti Chapel, but the commission was not given by any Medici; Lorenzo figures in the series by Sandro Botticelli, known to have

been executed for the Pucci family, but the arms of Julius II. on one of them points to a date when Lorenzo had long been in his grave. There were plenty of grand and noted painters both in Florence and in other parts of Italy—mature in Lorenzo's youth and ripening with his manhood—but it does not appear that he noticed any of them. His supposed interest in Michael Angelo—only seventeen years of age when Lorenzo died—is founded mainly on a puerile story by Vasari which any visitor to the Uffizi, who will take the trouble, may disprove.[1] Altogether Lorenzo

[1] This story relates to the head of the 'Old Satyr,' known as a youthful work by Michael Angelo, and still in the Sala delle Iscrizione of the Uffizi. Vasari states that Lorenzo de' Medici seeing the young lad engaged on this head, which has the mouth grinning and half open, so as to show tongue and teeth, observed, 'Thou oughtest to know that old men never have all their teeth.' Whereupon Michael Angelo seized a tool, and, before Lorenzo had well turned his back, struck out one of the front teeth, making it appear as if it had fallen naturally. On Lorenzo's return he was so delighted with the boy's cleverness that he told the story to all his friends, and forthwith took him under his protection. The answer to this is that in the departure from the human to the animal character, the front teeth had purposely been modelled wide apart, and any one can see that no tooth has been knocked out, or could have stood in the vacant space.

de' Medici's patronage of pictorial art, whether in easel pictures or in fresco, rests more on the imagination of certain modern biographers than on any sober facts of history.

It must also be borne in mind that Leonardo was then comparatively undistinguished as a painter—the pictures believed to belong to his early period owning their subsequent fame more to what he became than to any inherent attraction. That he rested his claim and patronage far less on his art than on his mechanical inventions, is obvious from the letter—supposed to have been written about 1481—addressed by him to Lodovico Sforza, called Il Moro, third son of the *condottiere* Francesco Sforza—the regent, and ultimately the usurper, of the Milanese Duchy. This letter is remarkable in every way, as a marvellous prospectus of his own powers, a characteristic page in the Italian history of the fifteenth century, and a melancholy one in that of mankind; where the demands of war and of peace stand in curious dispropor-

tion, and where his art of painting comes in apparently as an afterthought: we give it entire.[1]

'Having, most illustrious Lord, seen and duly considered the experiments of all those who repute themselves masters and inventors of instruments of war, and having found that their instruments differ in no way from such as are in common use, I will endeavour, without wishing to injure any one, to make known to your Excellency certain secrets of my own as briefly enumerated here below.

'1. I have a way of constructing very light and strong bridges, most easy to carry, by which one may pursue, or, at times, flee from, the enemy. Others also of a strong kind that resist fire or assault, and are easy to place and to remove. I know ways also for burning and destroying those of the enemy.

'2. In case of investing a place I know how to remove water from the trenches, and

[1] This extraordinary letter, which is written from left to right, and is unsigned, is evidently, from its numerous corrections, only the draft for the epistle to Lodovico. But Dr. Richter entertains no doubt as to its authenticity.

to make various scaling-ladders and other such instruments.

'3. Item, if on account of the height, or strength of position, the place cannot be bombarded, I have a way for ruining every fortress which is not on stone foundations.

'4. I can also make a kind of cannon, easy and convenient to transport, that will discharge inflammable stuff, causing great injury to the enemy, and also great terror from the smoke.

'5. Item, by means of narrow and winding underground passages, made without noise, I can contrive a way for passing under ditches or any stream.

'6. Item, I can construct covered carts, secure and indestructible, bearing artillery, which entering among the enemy will break the strongest body of men, and behind which infantry can follow without any impediment.

'7. Item, I can construct cannon, mortars, and fire engines of the finest forms, different from those in common use.

'8. Where the use of cannon fails I can

replace them by catapults, mangonels, and engines for discharging missiles of admirable efficacy and hitherto unknown ; and in short, according as the case may be, I can contrive endless means of offence.

'9. And, if the fight should be at sea, I have numerous engines of utmost activity both for attack and defence, and vessels which will resist the heaviest fire ; also powders and vapours.

'10. In time of peace I believe I can equal any one in architecture and in constructing buildings, public or private, and in conducting water from one place to another.

'Item, I can execute sculpture, whether in marble, bronze, or terra-cotta ; also in painting I can do as much as another, be he who he may.

'Further, I would engage to execute the bronze horse in lasting memory of my lord your father, and the illustrious house of Sforza ; and, if any of the above-mentioned things appear impossible or impracticable, I offer to make experiment of them in your

park, or in any place that may please your Excellency, to whom I recommend myself in utmost humility, &c.'

This letter seems to have obtained for Leonardo the desired invitation to the court of Milan, accompanied with a salary; chiefly, Vasari says, because the Duke wished to hear him sing—an accomplishment of which the letter makes no profession. There can be no doubt, however, that music was one of Leonardo's acquirements, and musical instruments among his inventions; new forms of the lyre, and improvements of sounding-board being sketched and described in his manuscripts. Amoretti also speaks of the frontispiece to a treatise on music, dedicated by a Florentine priest to Ascanio Sforza, brother to Lodovico, in which Leonardo is represented with a guitar in his hand. Doubtless the profligate Duke and his court were not slow to discover that Leonardo's gifts and powers of attraction were by no means all enumerated in this letter, and that they had drawn a prize as valuable for idle hours as for more serious uses.

Biographers dwell on his great popularity with the court, and we can readily believe in the fascination of his personal beauty and address, in the admiration excited by his feats of horsemanship and muscular strength, and in the pastime afforded to pedants and bores by the wonder of his inventions and the fun of his caricatures. In his double character, also, as artist and mechanician, there was no one to rival him in the invention and direction of those frequent shows and pageants which formed part of the policy of a bad ruler and of a doubtful throne, but which unfortunately left no trace of the genius wasted upon them. But respect for genius, in a real sense, was hardly compatible with the nature of any Italian court at that time; and that of Milan, though perhaps not more cruel or depraved than others, presented features peculiarly detestable. Nor was its character improved by the addition of Beatrice d'Este, in honour of whose marriage with Lodovico, in 1492, great festivities were enacted; who is known

by her violence and heartless pride to have greatly aggravated the sufferings of the young Gian Galeazzo and his Neapolitan wife, the rightful Duke and Duchess of Milan.

We turn from spectacles of an hour to the two great *capi d'opera* executed in Milan, which first made him famous—the one then, and the other for ever since. Precise dates and particulars fail for both. The model of the great bronze horse, in honour of Francesco Sforza, to which the letter alludes, seems, at all events, to have been his first employment. The history of this famous work is wrapt in mystery, and even the long-believed idea that its execution extended over sixteen years is now interpreted rather as the interval between the artist's competition for it and the entry of the French army into Milan, which was supposed to be fatal to it. At all events, sketches for it by the master's hand are numerous, though no indication exists as to which was preferred. Many, and those supposed to be the earliest, represent the horse in a galloping or rearing

position, with a prostrate foe: others show a walking or pacing action, with no figure beneath. From some cause—either his own fastidiousness or an injury from without—the horse is said to have figured in a procession and to have been broken — the enormous mass, which would have taken 100,000 lbs. of metal to cast (some biographers say 200,000 lbs.) was modelled by him twice over. For one little line survives, in his own left-handed writing—like a spot of *terra firma* in the great void of dates—which says that 'on the 23rd April, 1490, I began this book, and recommenced the horse.' True to his nature, he so mastered the anatomy of the animal as to write a treatise on the subject, in which forty pages of studies of the actions of the horse appear; marginal jottings of the scaffolding, and even of the iron bars and rivets, needed to sustain the enormous weight of clay, are also given; for in all things Leonardo began from the very *a b c.* Nor need we wonder to find every operation connected with the casting of bronze recorded

in his scattered memoranda. But of the object of all these pains no trace has survived; though as to the cause or manner of its disappearance the world is left in darkness; the story of its having been destroyed by the French archers in 1499 being now disproved, proofs having appeared that it was in existence years after that date. As long, however, as the model was seen, much more was thought of it, by himself and by those around him, than of the other great work contemporarily going on. All Italy talked of it; verse and prose were alike enlisted, and alike emptily, in its favour; Paolo Giovio, *à propos* of it, places Leonardo's plastic powers far above those of his brush, and says that the artist himself did the same; '*Plasticam ante alia penicillo præponebat.*'

It is much to be regretted that no sample of the great master in the character of a sculptor has come down to us. Not a scrap of clay, wax, bronze, or marble exists which can be proved to be by his hand, or which bears the stamp of it.[1] The very nature of

[1] M. Rio, in his 'Art Chrétien,' mentions as in the

his art, also, its positiveness and individuality, is at variance with the higher laws of sculpture. Judging also from the designs, there is, as M. Clément admits, no reason to believe that the monument would have excelled, or even reached the same level as Verocchio's Colleoni at Venice, or Donatello's Gattemalata at Padua. Nor is there any indication of Leonardo's admiration of such specimens of antique sculpture as had especially come to light in the north of Italy, unless we accept the evidence of his own epitaph, rendered more than proverbially untrustworthy by having been composed in his own life and under his correction, and which refers rather to the works of Vitruvius and the 'Divina Proporzione' of orders of architecture which much occupied his mind, than to antique art properly so called. As we have said before, classic art, excepting in such instances as the Pisan sculptors and the school of Padua

possession of M. Thiers 'une petite figure en ivoire, d'un travail exquis, qu'il serait difficile d'attribuer à un autre qu'à Léonard.' It perished, we fear, with other things of beauty, in the destruction of the late President's house.

under Mantegna, was sought rather for its associations with classic literature than for its own beauties.

We turn to that stupendous monument of human skill which all the powers adverse to a work of art have not yet totally obliterated. It has a gallery of its own in the way of copies, a library of its own in the form of description, an epic of its own in the annals of maltreatment. We read what that picture has suffered with something of the same pain as of the torture of some noble animal. The misery and distraction of Italy fell heavily on the great 'Cena,' as upon every good and beautiful thing. Fifty years after its completion its glory had already departed. A painter called it a mere blotch of colour, a cardinal called it a mere relic. Then came the monks and pierced the feet of the Saviour afresh, and broke the legs of the disciples. Quack doctors followed, who professed to know a healing secret, and who anointed and painted over the wounds with gaudy colours, till, in the opinion of the Milanese people, it

was far more beautiful than when it issued from the master's hand. Half a century later, in 1770, the small remains of original epidermis were carefully scarified, and a new restorer is believed to have given it the *coup de grâce.* From time to time, also, the waters rose and soaked the walls to which so precious a surface had been imperfectly attached. Finally, the horses of Napoleon's cavalry were stalled in its august presence, innocent, at all events, of the sanctuary they defiled. And when wars had ceased, and the map of Europe had been rearranged, the new masters of Lombardy paraded their possession of the majestic ruin by nailing the wretched emblazonry of their Imperial house directly above the head of the Saviour. To this day, perhaps of necessity, a species of tinkering, under the plea of preservation, is always going on, and every fresh visit to it shows fresh dilapidation; yet the 'Last Supper,' by Leonardo da Vinci, in the Refectory of the Convent of the Madonna delle Grazie, at Milan, remains, even now, one of the greatest *impressions* a cultivated mind can receive.

We do not underrate the seeds of injury sown by Leonardo himself. Here that tentative, experimental system, proper for science but dangerous for art, which was his ruling passion, led him to discard the safe and common process of fresco. This process, too, required a promptness of execution foreign to his nature. The painter who never knew when to have done touching and retouching, necessarily abjured the usually prepared wall, and devised in its stead a preparation, untried and untrustworthy, on which he worked with some form of oil medium. For a contemporary describes often seeing him leave the 'Corte Vecchia,' where he was modelling the great horse, and run to the Convent, where he would mount the scaffold, give a few touches, and then return. These touches could only be in oil, for fresco permits of no such coquetting. Lastly, the chief cause for the decay of the work, the damp situation, may safely be laid to the folly or tyranny of the usurper himself. The old convent, mainly owing to the frequent inundations, had fallen

into ruins, when Lodovico, either from ignorance or ill-will, compelled the monks to rebuild it on the same low ground, the refectory being on the lowest part of it. The building thus raised, with the prospect of fresh ruin before it, was cheaply and carelessly constructed. Göthe, who inspected it, reports the wretched materials of which the columns and arches were composed—old, crumbling bricks, and porous stone impregnated with salts, which exuded through the whitewash. Still, there is no doubt that fresco operations would not have suffered in the same degree, as evidenced by the better state of Montorfani's contemporary work on the opposite wall.

We spare the reader further details of the oft-told tale, and will only briefly analyse the place of this great work—the actual execution of which is assigned to the period from 1496 to 1498 [1]—in the art of the century and in the art of the master. The choice of the subject marks Leonardo's Florentine deriva-

[1] The first engraving dates from 1497.

tion. Excepting in illuminated MSS. the 'Last Supper' had hardly been seen out of Florence, where frescoes of it by the school of Giotto, and by Orgagna, in Santa Croce and the Ognissanti, must have been known to him. It was one of the most difficult subjects a painter could undertake—numerous figures, all male, all seated, and all comparatively inactive. But the painters above mentioned, at all events, aimed in the direction of that goal which Leonardo alone reached. The difference between them and him is one of degree, not of kind. It is usual to talk of his throwing off the fetters of tradition, but it was certainly not those fetters which obstructed his predecessors, nor the release from them which ensured his success. The traditional feature consisted in little more than the isolated position of Judas on the side of the table nearest the spectator.[1] The more perfect representation of the sub-

[1] The 'Last Supper' in S. Onofrio, Florence, at one time attributed to Raphael, was most probably executed before Leonardo's work, for Judas sits alone in front. After the Milan 'Cena' was known, no one observed this tradition.

ject depended solely on the more perfect development of the powers of art, and especially of the art of expression. In this respect Leonardo was pointed out to be the painter of the 'Last Supper,' for he had all the subtleties of expression and action equally within his grasp. Instead of being his difficulty, this was his opportunity. Twelve different individualities had to be portrayed, all agitated by the same central cause—the words of Christ—and all diversely. Scripture prescribed an impetuous Peter—a gentle and loving John—a guilty son of perdition; but Leonardo cast himself on his own feeling for the rest, and created disciples out of such types of men as best combined to make a grand dramatic whole. He even departed from the letter of Scripture to serve his art—the only authority the true painter acknowledges—and made St. John leaning away from the Lord, instead of on His breast; thus giving greater space and dignity to the chief figure. Much controversy has been wasted, and even recently, as to whether the

head of Christ was taken from the Byzantine type. But the Byzantine type of our Lord varies from the grandest to the most abject; Leonardo's character, and the picture in question, are ill comprehended by those who think that he would be guided by either, or that any trace of either is recognisable. The stories of his awe and hesitation in delineating the head of the Saviour rest on no foundation, beyond Vasari, except the sentimentality of the Faithful. Instead of having been left unfinished, it is, even in its present state, evident that it was one of those most carefully completed. But a work of this date is sure to be encrusted with fables; one of them, with all the true Vasarian tinge, has been so long disproved that it is strange to find it retained by any writer of the present day. The story runs, namely, that the prior of the convent, impatient at Leonardo's delays, made interest with the duke to urge him to greater speed; to whom the painter is stated to have replied, that great artists were thinking most while doing least; and

that being at a loss for a head as a fitting type for Judas, he was determined, if importuned further, to revenge himself by taking that of the reverend father himself. At this the duke laughed heartily, said he was quite right, and the poor prior went to dig in his garden, and left Leonardo in peace. This foolish story has been further converted by succeeding biographers into the fact that the head of the traitor does actually represent the prior of that time, and forms to this day part of the stock tale told to travellers who have the patience to listen to the poor *custode* of the place. The simple answer to all this is, that with his cartoons of every head, already drawn, and doubtless stencilled on the wall, there could have been no hesitation about a model for that of Judas. Further, that the prior, Fra Vincenzo Bandelli, a man of distinction, was too much in favour with the duke for that personage to have encouraged even the menace of such an insult; and lastly, that he is known to have been a man of advanced age, bald, grey, and with

fine features—the utmost contrast in all these respects to the Judas of Leonardo's conception.[1]

This work, which stands alone as the keystone of Christian pictorial art, is equally solitary as combining all the painter's powers. It was thoroughly completed; without over-finish, and without a sign of vacillation or correction. It bears the aspect of having been executed *con amore*, a quality hardly characteristic of any other work by the master, whose art has more the air of study than of delight. It may be added that it is entirely Italian in character. Steering closer to positive daily life than had been before attempted, the heads are types under which the varieties of Italian physiognomy may still be classified. The hands, too, would identify a people who gesticulate, not more perhaps than colder races—for the Germans brandish dirty hands in every direction—but with a grace and histrionic expression, as

[1] See Tiraboschi, *Litteratura Italiana*, p. 1763, *note*. Also *Conversations Lexicon*, article on Leonardo da Vinci.

well as a display of beautiful forms, which make their gestures especially worthy a painter's study.

M. Clément doubts the religious or Christian tendency of Leonardo's art, and we readily agree with him that this is not its special aim or excellence. The highest religious impression is given, perhaps, as a rule, by the art which has not attained maturity; as the truly spiritual utterance proceeds oftener from the child than from the man. Perfect art engages our attention more for itself than for its subject. That the 'Last Supper' produces a really religious impression is because it so truly tells the awful tale; but that impression was not the necessary result of Leonardo's own spiritual aspirations —aspirations not seen in any other work by him. The highest spiritual expression he has conveyed lies in his Holy Children. Yet even in them it does not represent a religious emanation, but simply that touching and solemn look of the pure infant, whether Christian or Pagan, 'over whom his immor-

tality broods like the day;' a look which scarcely another painter has so noted from life. For Leonardo's forte, we must remember, was accurate observation of eye, not innate fervour of spirit. The period, not his own tendencies, caused him, as it did many others, to paint Church pictures ; and we have, therefore, to thank the period that such subjects came within the range of his acute perceptions. We have, indeed, to thank the Church for more than is generally acknowledged, that she did supply a demand for at least decorous subjects. Had Art been left to the patronage of profligate patrons—such as were then almost all the princes of Italy—pictures would too often have been identified with subjects unfit for contemplation.[1]

Leonardo, after the 'Last Supper,' stands on the highest step he, or any modern painter, has attained. He painted, doubtless in Milan, the two exquisite portraits now in the Ambrogian Library, miscalled 'Lodovico il Moro'

[1] It is an error to suppose that Savonarola waged war against Art. He condemned 'nudities,' but declared that it was better to paint than to beg.

and 'Beatrice d'Este;' but most probably, as agreeing better in age, representing the unfortunate Gian Galeazzo and Isabella of Arragon. Also portraits of Lodovico's mistresses; one of which has disappeared, while the other is believed to be recognised in the so-called 'Belle Ferronière,' in the Louvre—a lady not disparaged by the mistake, since she occupied a similar position towards Francis I. That the few 'Holy Families,' recognised by the true odour of Leonardesque sweetness, were executed in Milan is also probable, for, as he increased in age and fastidiousness, beginnings seem to have been all he achieved, and but few of them. Altogether, there are not more than five or six pictures which connoisseurs acknowledge, and those only in parts, to be by his hand, and even on those few they are not unanimous.

After the departure of the master from Milan to Florence, on the fall of Lodovico—1499–1500—all connected with his art, as with his life, is more or less disappointing. He eagerly superseded the gracious Filippino

Lippi, who gave up to him the commission for an altar-piece for the church of the Serviti, but in which Leonardo proceeded no further than the cartoon now belonging to the Royal Academy. He quitted the atmosphere of this dawning creation of virginal and blissful heads and gentle caresses to become chief military engineer to Cæsar Borgia, then ravaging the Romagna and Umbria. Returning after a time to Florence, he accepted a commission to paint one of the walls of the Great Hall in the Palazzo Vecchio, but embarked his design on a surface still more insecurely prepared than that of the 'Last Supper.' It fell to pieces under his hand, while, even of the cartoon, nothing has survived except Rubens' paraphrase of part of it, engraved by Edelinck under the name of the 'Battle of the Standard.'

It has been seen that Leonardo offered himself in his letter to Lodovico as 'equal to others in architecture.' This slight sketch, therefore, requires some mention of this additional form of his practice of art. His

earliest biographers, Vasari and Lomazzo, style him 'Pittore e Architetto,' and there is no doubt that his exact mind was peculiarly constituted to take delight in the principles of this study. His chief friend in Milan, who is said to have resided with him, was Fra Luca Pacioli, professor of mathematics and architecture, to whom also two other of what we may call the learned and scientific painters of Italy were known—Pietro della Francesca and Melozzo da Forlì. It was for the Frate's work on 'La Divina Proporzione' that Leonardo executed above sixty geometrical illustrations, all drawn, as is said in the preface, 'with that ineffable left hand.' Numerous sketches of edifices designed by Leonardo, or taken from existing buildings, are scattered through his writings; he was also associated with a commission for the elevation of the cupola of Milan Cathedral, but no building remains to show what he could practically do.

Of his poetic vein only the one sonnet remains, commencing—

Chi non può quel che vuol, quel che può voglia.

But even this single sonnet—by no means wanting in intrinsic merit—suffices to show the character of the mind. The same tale is told in this small page as in all the rest of the volume. Close observation, sensible advice, and that careful finish which gives a certain charm even to thoughts rising little above mere truisms, are all here—the accents of a votary of experience rather than of a lover of Song. It may be doubted whether much of Leonardo's verse has been lost; a voice that observes such discreet limits has not much to say. Poetry must be fed either from the heart or the imagination; and in all we are permitted to see of the man himself, the one is scantily bared to view, and the other never encouraged.

We turn now to other forms of his intellectual activity. Even with their help the records of his doings at Milan, embracing probably a period of nearly twenty years, and those in the prime of his vigour, are but scantily filled up. It is more inferred than known—and that chiefly from an engraving

of a curiously interlaced pattern surrounding a circle,[1] in which is the inscription 'Academia Leonardi Vici'—that there was an academy of art at Milan, and that he was at the head of it. It is further concluded that his 'Trattato della Pittura' embodies the notes of lectures addressed by him to his scholars. Volumes of jottings, scribblings, marginal hints and sketches, some of them of the grandest order—but sparks from which none but himself could then draw light—attest habits of observation, reasoning, and deduction which never flagged. All these, however, added to ever-recurring shows and pageants, yet leave the sense of many a blank page.

The principal edition of the work by Leonardo just mentioned, called 'Il Trattato della Pittura,' was published from a copy in the Vatican—the best version then existing, though known to have been imperfectly compiled from a MS. now lost. It has now been Dr. Richter's good fortune to discover a considerable portion of the original 'Trattato' in

[1] Given as frontispiece to Amoretti's work.

Lord Ashburnham's fine library at Ashburnham Place. This work throws curious and unmistakable light on Leonardo both as thinker and painter. Positive as opposed to imaginative in character, it confirms all the theory of his mind which we have endeavoured to draw from his art. It consists of rules and precepts in separate chapters, amounting to 450 in number, and entirely addressed to the principles and practice of art. It has been surmised that this collection is not entirely original, but gathered from the sweepings of desk and studio, and arranged by friends or pupils. To our view, however, it contains abundant internal evidence of the master's sole hand. There is all his over-conscientiousness of detail, which, like his art, '*approche parfois à la puérilité*;' and, above all, there is that peculiar lingering over preparatory foundations, as if from a kind of shyness to grapple with the real task, which characterised all he undertook. He says that '*il Pittore è Padrone di tutte le cose*,' but the things he thinks necessary to show this

mastery required a patience no one but himself possessed. With strict habits of analytic reasoning, step by step, he has no sympathy with the more rapid deductions of other minds, and goes on teaching long after his reader has been taught. The work embraces every stage of instruction from A to Z; from useless speculations and wearisome platitudes —sacrifices doubtless to the pedantry of the time—to the closest and subtlest observations of an eye which saw everything, even, as the French would say, to *les yeux des fourmis*, and reasoned on all it saw. The student is invited at the outset to inquire whether poetry or painting, or painting or sculpture, be the superior art—whether the world would lose most if all men were deaf or all were blind. He is reminded that he must walk before he can run—that if he wants to read he must learn his letters; or to climb a wall he must mount by gradual steps. And before the work concludes he is initiated, at the slowest possible pace, into every imaginable distinction of light, shade, colour, half-shadows,

primary and derived shadows, half-lights, reflexions, reverberations—whether in the open field or within the limit of a room—by sunshine, cloud, or firelight—by atmosphere, clear or misty—by morning, noon, or evening—that can variously affect objects, coloured or colourless, flat or relieved, large or small, near or distant. It is evident, as shown in Sir Charles Eastlake's 'Essay on Göthe's Theory of Colours,' that Leonardo was familiar with Aristotle's treatise, and that the precepts which his experience dictates for the use of the scholar are in accordance with, if not derived from, the older authority. The same changes are also rung on every diversity of beauty and grace, form, action, position, proportion, measurement, weight, balance; in man, woman, and child, and even in animals; in things the most general, as in things the most particular; as applicable equally to the whole figure, and to different ages, and different parts of it—from the mean average measurements of the body to the minutest actions of separate members; how figures

jump, and how figures run; what muscles are set in movement when a man wants to look at his own heels; how the joints of a finger are larger when bent than when straight; how we can neither ascend nor descend, nor walk on level ground, without raising the heel of the hindermost foot; how a man walking goes quicker with his head than with his feet; and even how the machinery that keeps his nose in the centre of the face is varied in eight different ways; till, through all the maze of these theories, and the labour of these directions, it is marvellous that any power of practice—and such practice as his—should have survived.

In no work by the master, in any form, is it more distinctly seen that the first great passion of the mind was Observation—indulged to an extent that, like his art, no amount of precision could satisfy it; and that the second was a no less imperative desire to inculcate on others what he had himself observed; the one ever impelling him to learn, the other to teach.

Occasionally, in contrast to (and relief from) such over-precise rules, which, in the effort at more and more clearness, end by confusing the reader, there occurs a paragraph of larger import; such as—

'A painter should never imitate another, or he will be called the nephew, and not the son, of Nature. For since Nature gives things in endless profusion, he should rather have recourse to her than go second-hand to those who have learnt from her.'[1]

Or we fall in with a hit against some parsimonious fellow-artist—perhaps his old fellow-scholar, Perugino:—

'The painter who mistrusts not himself will learn little. If his work be above his judgment, he will never improve; if his judgment be above his work (and this was too much his own case), he will never cease to improve; *se l'avarizia non l'impedisce.*'[2]

One paragraph also shows a grudge against a portion of his fellow-creatures among the lower classes of Italy, who, it

[1] Cap. xxiv. [2] Cap. xli.

must be confessed, are to this day not always gentle or picturesque. Dwelling on the distinctions in action and movement proper to children and to young women, to old men and old women;—how children should be represented with quick, oblique movements when seated, but straight and timid ones when standing: young women with modest action, the knees closed, the arms gathered together, the head inclined forward, and rather on one side: old men with bent knees, and slow and heavy step;—he adds directions for the characteristic portrayal of the aged representatives of the female sex which we would not translate for the world!—*Le Vecchie si debbono figurare ardite e pronte, con rabbiosi movimenti, a guisa di furie infernale!*'[1]

What will most interest the analyser of Leonardo's own art, in this work, are the indications of what are known to be his favourite excellences—the close modelling, namely, and delicate gradations of light and shade by which he aimed at the utmost roundness and

[1] Cap. lxiii.

relief. Throughout the numerous paragraphs on the treatment of lights and shadows will be found warnings against '*ombre terminate*,' or shadows with distinct terminations; urging the student to that observation of the lesser shades and lesser lights by which the extremes of both can be united without line or edge '*a uso di fumo*'—in the manner of smoke—a precept which gave rise to a word of his invention, still in the painter's vocabulary, and without which it would be difficult to define Leonardo's mode of execution, viz. '*sfumato*.' We see also his distaste to all exaggerated muscular markings—prompted perhaps by the sight of Michael Angelo's school—which he defines as 'looking more like a sack of walnuts than a human figure;' while in his directions for the 'beauty of faces,'[1] he says: 'Do not make muscles with sharp definitions, but let the soft light terminate insensibly in sweet and pleasing shadows, whence proceed grace and beauty.' A certain feeling also against the school of colour

[1] Cap. cxci.

—grapes which were somewhat sour to him —may be suspected, as opposed to the roundness he ever aimed at. He designates it as calculated to gain the applause of the vulgar, 'who desire nothing more than beauty of colour, not understanding that of relief.'[1]

But the 'Trattato della Pittura,' while implying studies far beyond its own special scope, gives no adequate measure of the mind which embraced in its observation the phenomena equally of earth, air, fire, and water. For such imperfect estimate of the genius of Leonardo as can now be formed—and however fragmentary the evidence, it can only gain in appreciation by the advance of science —we must look to those collections of memoranda, alternately written and drawn, which under the name of 'books' he bequeathed to his friend Francesco Melzi. The original amount of these 'remains' no one can tell, for no inventory of them exists. They were brought back to Italy by Melzi, who survived his friend till 1570, after which his descend-

[1] Cap. cclxxvii.

ants, sinking with their country's degradation, tossed them into the garret of that Villa Vapri, on the walls of which Leonardo's mark, in the form of the colossal 'Madonna and Child,' still remains It is impossible to trace the hands through which these MSS. have passed, the mutilations they have suffered, or the amount that has been lost. One volume belonged to Ambrogio Ficino, a remote scion of the Leonardo school, who died in 1608, leaving it to Vespino, a still more degenerate descendant of the great master. One was in the possession of Cardinal Federigo Borromeo; a third belonged to Carlo Emmanuele of Savoy, and is supposed to have perished in one of the fires that consumed the Royal Library at Turin. Some found their way to Charles I.'s collection—one volume was obtained by 'Consul Smith' of Venice—but the greater number, amounting to thirteen volumes, gravitated eventually by a natural process to the Ambrogian Library, whence they were carried off by the French commissioners, too well informed to overlook

their great importance. Owing, as we have said, to the negligence of the Austrian Government, one only volume, the 'Codice Atlantico'—it is true by far the most important—was restored to its former place in the Ambrogian Library; the twelve others still remaining in Paris, and not readily shown by the French, lest too much attention should be called to their unjust possession.[1] M. Clément, on this account perhaps, omits to dwell on them, though he describes the large volume purchased some years ago from Signor Vallardi by the Louvre. Other smaller collections exist in the Vatican, in the Casa Trivulzi, Milan, and in the British Museum. No one, however, before Dr. Richter, can be said to have thoroughly explored these endless Sibylline leaves. And,

[1] According to the 'Saggio delle Opere di Leonardo' the twelve volumes in Paris were gravely mutilated in order to enrich the two volumes in the collection of Lord Ashburnham. This is far from having been the case; only two small portions of MS., abstracted from the Paris books, and now returned to them, found their way into the Ashburnham collection. These are interspersed with small pen drawings of various weapons, chiefly javelins, and a few sketches of circular edifices.

considering the age of the writing, its strange contractions and orthography, its wearisome left-handed character, and the disorder into which these manuscripts have been shuffled, it needed an enthusiast, as well as an expert, of singular knowledge and patience to devote himself to them. Even when assisted by the pencil, 'which speaks the tongue of every land,' the ideas remain, many of them, enigmatical.

But we must now allude to the essay on the 'Science and Literature of Leonardo da Vinci,' by Mr. C. C. Black, of the South Kensington Museum, which forms part of Mrs. Heaton's work. This is by far the most popular and comprehensive view yet given of the multiform sides of one who has bequeathed to posterity so much of his mind and so little of his life. It would be difficult to compile a list even of the subjects which occupied a mind to which the readily applied commonplace of 'before his time' renders no justice; and which, a hundred years before Bacon, led the way to

those experimental principles—'the only method,' in his own words, 'to be observed in the study of the phenomena of Nature.' The discoveries of Leonardo da Vinci, in the language of Mr. Hallam, 'are rather such as to strike us with preternatural awe—more like the revelations of physical truths vouchsafed to a single mind, than the superstructure of its reasoning upon any preceding and established basis.' Beginning with his art, there was the study of anatomy, never before so thoroughly mastered and exemplified; to the accuracy of which, as evidenced by his drawings, we have the tribute of our own great anatomist, John Hunter.[1] Connected with his engineering labours was his mastery of mathematical and geometrical laws; connected with his geometry, his knowledge of perspective; to which appertains his suggestion of the camera obscura, clearly described in the 'Trattato,' and falsely attributed to his junior, Albert Dürer. From perspective to the laws regulating light the way was imme-

[1] See Hunter's Lectures, published 1784.

diate, the words perspective and optics being then convertible terms. And here the ingenious little instrument of our day, the stereoscope, did not escape his foresight. Though not its actual inventor, he indubitably preceded our own Wheatstone in the recognition of its principle. For, noticing that slight diversity of the two images of every object presented simultaneously to both eyes, by which we obtain the solidity and relief of actual nature—of the rationale of which he gives a geometrical illustration,—he confesses that a picture, however elaborate, cannot possibly—and, in the interest of art, we may add fortunately—present the same effect of reality. Continuing in the same line of cognate phenomena, he suggests a method of measuring light, which, two centuries later, appeared as a French discovery—he wrote a treatise on Lights and Shadows—pointed the way to the burning-glass, and more than the way to the telescope; for a drawing of this instrument appears in the 'Codice Atlantico.' Thence he is found diverging to the still

mysterious field of acoustics—to the vibrations of tones, the velocity of sound, and the construction of certain musical instruments;—to the laws which govern force, motion, and gravitation; with a thorough working out of the principles of the lever and of the pendulum, and a clearly indicated apprehension of the rotation of the earth;—to the actions of weight, pressure, and attrition,—to the density of the atmosphere, and the first construction of the barometer, under the design for which are his words, '*modo di vedere quando si guasta il tempo*;'—to an improvement in the compass, since in common use;—to the idea of marine vessels propelled by wheels against the current;—so working his way to the great practical area of mechanics, which he calls 'the Paradise of the mathematical sciences.'

Indeed, it is superfluous for his reputation to credit him any longer with the formation of the Martesana Canal—called il Naviglio—one of the stock tales which have been repeated *ad nauseam*. This work, like the

grand 'Spedale,' and other undertakings of utility and beauty at Milan, was owing not to Lodovico il Moro, but to the far nobler ruler, his father, Francesco Sforza, and is known to have been completed before Leonardo's arrival in Milan.[1] There is proof, however, that Leonardo invented new lock-gates, and repaired the canal. The investigation of the forces, for good or for evil, of moving bodies of water—rivers and torrents—is the duty to which every great Italian engineer may be said, by the character of his native land, to be especially called. In the inundation of the Po in 1493, by which the convent refectory of S. Maria delle Grazie was submerged, the thoughts of the painter must have pondered on the methods by which such periodical catastrophes could be averted. To ensure the safe application of that science of hydraulics which was his especial forte and delight, the principles of hydrostatics were the indispensable step. In all things, accordingly, beginning with the beginning,

[1] Tiraboschi, p. 1701.

we find him searching and defining the laws applicable to fluids in a state of rest—capillary attraction and equality of pressure—the action of the syphon—the bore of the since established Artesian well, and that emptying of ditches and conducting of water professed in his letter to the duke. The prominence of the business of war, continually entailed by the treachery of the wretched potentates who eventually degraded the fairest peninsula on this earth, is of course conspicuous in these notes and memoranda. Competent judges have borne witness that Leonardo's profession of improved powers of destruction was no empty boast. Living on the debatable ground between ancient and modern modes of warfare—between the catapult and the cannon—he gave new forms and increased forces to each. Sketches still remain which show that the greater destructiveness and further range of what we now know as the *mitrailleuse*, and conical projectiles, were anticipated in his brain. Nay, even the use of steam as applied to a monstrous form of

cannon, finds its place as a seed dropped by a mind which stands like one in the centre of a circle, towards whom all main lines of modern knowledge—astronomy, geology, chemistry, mechanics, natural history, and even botany—converge. And yet a mind, in curious respects, not disconnected with its own period; attracted at one time, doubtless in youth, by the chimæra of perpetual motion, flying men, aërial chariots, winged ships; ideas, with others not less baseless, which survive in his writings, and with them his own recognition of their absurdity, being marked here and there with a marginal '*falso*,' or '*non è desso*.' And yet not abandoned till, pursuing his own experimental system, he had sifted the more from the less practicable plan; as in the construction of a flying-machine, in which he had fixed on the wing of the bat as better fitted for imitation than that of the bird.

True also to himself in the things he forbore to look into. No sign in these great repertories of original thought of any interest in metaphysics, theology, or the philosophy

of the schoolmen. Like Galileo after him, following no fruitless inquiry into first causes; seeking nothing that he might not hope to prove. 'What is that,' he says, 'that does not give itself to human comprehension, and, if it did, would not exist? It is the Infinite, which, if it could so give itself, would be done and ended.' No sign either, as far as these repertories have been explored, of any interest in the world then around him. Columbus was only ten years older than he —Savonarola exactly his own age. States were falling—foes were invading; but to judge from these records such men and such facts existed not. Even the great painters contemporary with him have left no mark in these writings, as far as hitherto known, unless in the hints we have indicated. Nor is there the slightest appearance that the higher demands of our nature were even repressed in him. No enthusiasm is seen to warp his judgment—no dreams of philanthropy to swell and agitate his heart—no love of woman to kindle unrest. Ever seeking to

solve all mechanical problems, he was neutral in presence of all moral truths. With intellect thus predominant, passion, impetuosity, and imprudence were foreign to him. Words dropped here and there further show the inner man. 'Flee from storms.' 'The painter should be solitary; if thou art alone, thou art all thine own.' 'Patience against injustice is as a garment against the cold; if the cold increases put on additional garments.' Such discretion as this does not seem to have altogether shielded him from the suspicions of the Church, though possibly from the wiles of the female sex; for the paltry mind of Vasari imputes to him 'ideas so heretical, that he did not conform to any religion, thinking it peradventure far better to be a philosopher than a Christian.' This passage, however, was withdrawn after the first edition. Leonardo also, in his 'Trattato,' speaks of himself as charged with two great offences—'working at my art on feast days, and investigating the works of God;' and gives the clue to his accusers, '*Farisei, ciò vuol dir santi*

Frati.' One sentence also implies that he had been imprisoned :—' When I made the Lord God an Infant, you imprisoned me.'

Let us pause a moment to recall the multiplied facets of this brilliant genius ; receiving and giving light in all directions—surpassing in art, and yet, relatively, less artist than physiologist, engineer, mathematician. Or rather, chiefly artist to the generation in which he lived, because the arts were the only form of his activity then genuinely in demand. The skilled labourer in every department. The man of all work for this world, and therefore of incomparably more work than the world then could use. With practical purposes in all his researches ; seeing, observing, noticing everything—the fall of the wave—the motion of the bird—the duration of the echo—the veins of the leaf—the bones of extinct animals—the scintillations of the stars—the conditions of the moon—the connexion of motion with heat—and these last two in terms which Nasmyth himself might have employed. And inventing every-

thing; for, in happy relief to his destructive ingenuities, his pages teem with every form of mercantile and even humblest domestic utility. For instance, designs for more than thirty kinds of mills—one even of a treadmill, a marvel of perspective and beauty of line; windlasses, cranes, machines for wire-drawing, plate-rolling, file-cutting; saws, drills, looms, instruments for flattening and dressing cloth; a surgical probe—a universal joint—a spring to close doors—cowls for smoky chimneys—the artist's so-called camp-stool—a roasting jack (still in use in Italy) moved by the draught of hot air; and, finally, last but not least, among the many things moved by wheels, the common wheelbarrow. Practical, too, in all things, even in such schemes as that of lifting the Baptistery of Florence on to a higher level, or moving mountains from one plain to another, which, if feasible at all, could only be by such means as he suggests. A man, appointed not so much to work in his own person as to be the universal supplier and prompter of work for the intellectual

and brute forces of others; who called himself humbly 'the disciple of practice;' but whom we may rather denominate as the priest and prophet of the laws and forces of nature.

Still, we linger over the course and character of Leonardo da Vinci with an absence of satisfaction painful to ourselves. Much of that which we feel to be wanting must be laid to the period to which he belonged. Who shall say how far every man participates in the good or evil in which he is appointed to move and live and have his being? Where independence of bearing and self-respect were looked upon, as in Michael Angelo, as surliness and crotchets; where he was most successful in life who could carry the darkest designs under the most friendly aspect and manner; and he alone safe who refused (while pretending it) credence to the most cordial assurances; where treachery and intrigue were the accepted statesmanship of the great, and flattery and insincerity the current coin of their subjects—in such a state of manners

and morals those few who could rise above the social standard had a twofold battle to fight—the one with themselves common to all men, the other with the weight of the custom around them. Such a warrior, it may be safely averred, Leonardo was not. He took things as he found them; neither lamenting (like Michael Angelo) that they were no better, nor caring to reform them. His transcendent genius was also of that kind which brings most temptation to its possessor. The man of shining gifts, as distinguished from the man of great qualities, has always a sphere, and is always in request; for he amuses, even instructs—never, even tacitly, reproves. Still, it is difficult to reconcile the contrast between this unceasingly working and thinking being, and the cowardly, heartless, and ignorant traitor and usurper, whose company flattered, and whose patronage alternately fed and starved him. The court of Lodovico Sforza was one of the most profligate and empty that existed even at a time when a Borgia occupied the Papal throne: Leonardo was in both

respects evidently the reverse. Even Vasari, who defamed Raphael, has no vicious gossip to tell of him; yet he contentedly breathed an atmosphere as uncongenial as unworthy of him. It must be taken into account that he was the first painter who lived in social equality with the great of the land, and for those who would live with them then on any terms, the debasing courtier element was inevitable. On the other hand, the fact that a tyrant like Lodovico il Moro surrounded himself with men of reputation for learning and arts has received, as with Lorenzo de' Medici, far too favourable an interpretation. Such environment, which would now be considered a pure tribute to genius, was then rather a politic but contemptible device which answered many purposes; the amusement of the hour, the diversion of scrutinising eyes, and the sure falsification of history.

Nevertheless, much of what we feel to be defective in Leonardo must inexorably be laid to himself. For no less strange and rare than the range of his intellectual gifts were the

extremes obvious in his character. In his art he reaches from the subtlest and sweetest beauty to the most unnatural and hideous deformity; in his writings from the grandest generalities to the most puerile particulars; in his daily habits from the profoundest studies and application to (we are assured) the vainest extravagance and ostentation; from the clearest methods of reasoning and closest accuracy of observation as regards cause and effect to all the sure consequences of reckless expenditure, disorder, and social degradation —debts, fawnings, unpaid salary, and humiliating beggings, even for clothes; in his life from the illustrious philosopher who commands the wonder and admiration of all enlightened ages, to the hireling who knew not the meaning of the word patriot; who shifted with every wind of fortune, executed *chefs d'œuvre* or invented toys, equally to flatter the French invader or the Milanese usurper; and placed himself, like the mercenary tropps of the time, at the disposal of whomsoever happened to be in power, no

matter how obtained; principally serving two of the most iniquitous princes of the age, Lodovico Sforza and Cæsar Borgia.

There is evidence, however, that these habits of self-accommodation to successive rulers exceeded even the latitude then allowed. However elastic the bonds of allegiance, the great master changed sides too often. He had looked with indifference at the usurpation of the throne of Milan, on the misery of the young Gian Galeazzo and his wife, and must be believed to have ignored the suspected dark sequel to that story. He had shown no reluctance to aid Lodovico in welcoming over the Alps those packs of French wolves under Charles VIII. who first overran the fair land of Italy. On the fall of Lodovico, caught in the toils he had spread for others, he had built triumphal arches for the entry of Louis XII.; and on Louis's discomfiture and the restoration of the young Maximilian, son of Lodovico, in 1512, Leonardo had disposed himself to renew his relations with the Sforza family. It appears

that on this occasion the court of Milan became, to use a familiar phrase, too hot for him, when, following his favourite maxim, 'Flee from storms,' he removed to Florence. There, having obtained the protection of the pusillanimous Julian de' Medici—son of Lorenzo the Magnificent—he accompanied that prince to Rome for the consecration of his brother Giovanni as Leo X., in 1513. But here a cold reception is said to have mortified him. The Pope, it is true, commissioned him to paint a picture—a task we may safely aver then become impossible to him. Instead of composing a design, he set to work with preparatory measures, and began to experimentalise on the distillation of fixed oils from certain plants—which led to the reputed saying on the Pope's part, 'Alas! this man is thinking of the end before he has made a beginning.' Nor did Michael Angelo or Raphael, both engaged on great works, show any disposition to enlist his co-operation. It was extremely improbable, if they knew anything of his fastidious and

dilatory habits in art, that they should do so; but it may be doubted whether the so-called rivalry between Michael Angelo and himself had anything to do with the matter, or whether that rivalry ever existed at all. Michael Angelo and Leonardo never approached each other's orbits except in the decoration of the great council hall of the Palazzo Vecchio. And in that instance the supposed rivalry of exhibition has been much exaggerated; for the cartoons were not seen by the public simultaneously; Leonardo's having been exhibited in 1504, and Michael Angelo's not till 1506. Far more probable is it, as surmised by M. Clément, that the man who had no passions and no opinions but those which suited his interest, and who had ceased to be a profitable *protégé* for those who coveted specimens of his art, began to be regarded with less interest, and was peculiarly antipathetic to the very opposite nature of the impetuous Buonarroti. At all events, the residence in Rome was short, and Leonardo is found again in Milan;

where a fresh turn of the wheel had taken place, erecting arches for the last new-comer, Francis I., for whom his automaton lion, who walked into the king's presence and opened his breast filled with French lilies, was especially contrived. From this time he remained true to the French service : openly showed himself in the suite of Francis at Bologna on the meeting between that monarch and the Pope, and revenged himself for all supposed slights by caricaturing the papal courtiers. Finally, as we all know, he removed altogether on to French soil, and died at the Château of Cloux, at Amboise, in 1519, having accepted salary and protection from the French king, and rendered him no single work in return. Truly has it been said, 'The spirit of that time was a menial spirit;' and not even such a mind as that of Leonardo was exempt from its influence. For, however marvellous the height at which his intellect soared above the age, the same superiority is not upheld in his life. Nothing is more true than that his conscience as artist

and natural philosopher was *incontentabile*—in art even a hindrance to his activity—but his reputation would stand higher had it been equally fastidious as a man.[1]

[1] Under the sensational title of the 'Death-bed of Leonardo,' an account is given by Mrs. Heaton, quoted from M. Arsène Houssaye's work, which attempts to revive the exploded tale of the great painter's death in a royal breast. We fail in these times, or perhaps in this country, to appreciate the object of this attempt. A story is told by Condivi of Julius III. who promised Michael Angelo the post-mortem compliment of embalming his body, and preserving it in the Pontifical private apartments: we know also that the forefinger of Galileo's right hand was detached from his remains, on their removal in 1737, and preserved by one of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany. The times, however, are over when such condescensions towards the dying and the dead can be construed into any real tribute to the claims of genius, or any compensation for its wrongs. On the other hand, the reported successful search for the body of Leonardo by the Comte de Paris, at the Château of Clos-Lucé, as now called, can only be viewed as a manly and intelligent homage to a great name.

THE LETTERS AND WORKS
OF
MICHAEL ANGELO

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THE figure of Michael Angelo, as man and artist, is a salient feature in the history not only of Art, but of mankind. How he thought, and what he said and did, no less than what he painted and modelled, are matters of interest to all who feel that 'the noblest study of mankind is man.' Nor is there any fear that the flight of time, now above four centuries since his birth, and the consequent changes in manners and aims, should have obscured the interpretation of his mind. That mind was never so little understood as by his own contemporaries; and the greater the space between him and them the more clearly are its grand moral outlines discerned. No man ever appealed more pathetically, however

tacitly, to the justice of posterity. 'All who sin, suffer,' Christopher North has said, 'whether they have genius or no.' But there are sufferings of isolation of heart, and grief of spirit, which are the penalties rather of superiority than of sin. Such penalties were the lot of Michael Angelo. He was called '*terribile*' by his generation, but the sternness and austerity which procured for him this designation were the natural armour of a great soul against the folly and ignorance which beset him on all sides—folly which knew no respect for greatness of any kind, and which scrupled not to interfere where the commonest manners would have feared to tread; namely, in the exercise and direction of his very Art. It is true his Art was not 'made tongue-tied by authority'—it would have puzzled even Papal Infallibility to do that; but, though the Popes he served were said to be afraid of him, he was none the less the lifelong sport of their vanities and superstitions, their evil tempers and bad faith.

There are no two words more constantly and unequally yoked together, and no two things more widely distinct, than 'Art' and 'Civilisation.' Without pretending to any niceties of definition, one broad distinction between them may be instanced. The condition which gives birth to art is precisely that under which true civilisation has never yet flourished. Art is the heritage of the *natural man*, whatever his creed—whether purely Pagan, or purely, or impurely, Christian. Fortunately for mankind, Art and Civilisation are not necessarily antagonistic terms or things—though it would be too deep a question here to inquire how far, in the highest sense of each, they are compatible. All we contend is that the one is no sign or guarantee of the other. On the contrary, the conditions which experience shows us to have been conducive to art are exactly those most prohibitive of civilisation. Art, respectively ancient and modern, never attained such perfection as under an elaborately organised Idolatry, and a sumptuously supported Superstition. Not

that either the Greek Pantheon or the Romish ceremonial (as some converts to Rome fondly assume) can be credited with any power of calling her into being; but when once the sacred spark has been kindled, the lowest worship or the most worldly aims can fan the flame; though they can do no more. Art is like the light of heaven, which shines equally on the just and the unjust; and like that light also, she proceeds only from One source, over which neither have the slightest control. The history of Italy shows that while her artists—the greatest that modern times have known—were advancing with sure and rapid steps to those heights where Michael Angelo stands pre-eminent, the country to which such men were born was hastening to a condition furthest removed from real civilisation. The very dates of Italy's proudest achievements in the art of painting are identical with those of the foulest iniquities in her high places, and of the deepest misery of her people. The 'Last Supper' by Leonardo da Vinci was executed at the time

when the traitor Sforza invited a French army across the Alps, and when a Borgia represented Christ on earth. Michael Angelo's Sistine Ceiling was commenced in the same year with that first transaction of European diplomacy—the League of Cambray ; an alliance unmatched in history for rapacity, cruelty, and perfidy, and the signal for a ten years' reign of devastation and carnage. Raphael's most creative years were contemporary with the period when two foreign armies vied with each other in ravaging the Peninsula—the sublime decorations of the Vatican were coincident with the worst passions and blackest deeds that ever laid a great people in the dust.

It is no insignificant comment on the Italy of what we may hope is the Past, that none have penned emptier tirades on that identity of Art and Civilisation which every page of their history contradicts, than the Italians themselves. It is a hopeful sign, therefore, of progress that their late writers, both on art and history, have abandoned so false a posi-

tion. Signor Gotti[1] and Cesare Balbo[2] may be cited. The last especially speaks thus uncompromisingly: 'And if, leaving aside the great men and names of the governing class, we turn to that history, too often neglected, of the masses of the people who are the true objects of government; if, assisted by the ample records, we address ourselves to know the private and universal condition of the Italians of that time' (15th and 16th centuries), 'we shall find transmitted from the governors to the governed, and reacting back from the one to the other, such universal depravity and immorality, such cowardice and perfidy, such effeminacy and sensuality, such sloth and such vices—in short, such vilenesses and corruptions, as hardly appear credible in a time of so-called Christian institutions.'

It is to this very absence of civilisation that the ruin of so much that was precious in Italian art has been owing. If Civilisation represents anything, it represents respect for

[1] *Vita di M. A. Buonarroti*, da Aurelio Gotti (Firenze, 1875).

[2] *Pensieri sulla Storia d' Italia*, p. 57.

life and law, for duty and honour; respect also for things of beauty, and more especially for the glories of the past. But in Italy there has been as little respect for what ennobles a country, as of contempt for what debases it: hence the maltreatment and destruction of irreplaceable works; not in the fury of reforming zeal, but in cold-booded apathy, against which no Italian voice for centuries was raised.

Our limits will not allow us to give a consecutive sketch of Michael Angelo's life, or a catalogue of his works—both of which we supplied some years ago to a contemporary.[1] All we can here mainly aim at is an analysis of his art, and also of his mind and character as developed in his letters.

The Letters of Michael Angelo,[2] '*edite e inedite*,' 495 in number, now printed in one large folio volume, are derived, some of them, from the State archives; but by far the greater portion from the ancient Casa Buonarroti purchased by Michael Angelo in 1508, though

[1] *Quarterly Review*, April 1858.

[2] *Le Lettere di M. A. Buonarroti*, pubblicate di cura di Gaetano Milanese (Firenze, 1875).

in a more modest form than it now presents.[1] At the decease of the Commendatore Cosimo Buonarroti—the last occupant of the Casa—in 1858, forty of these letters were sold to the British Museum by his cousin—a very degenerate 'Michael Angelo Buonarroti'—after whose death, in 1860, the Municipality of Florence became possessed of the house and its contents, now open to the public. The British Museum letters have been partially published by Herr Grimm, and by M. Piot. The earliest letter bears date 1495, when the fiery young man had attained his twenty-first year.

The publication of these Letters has been looked forward to with the keenest interest. Nor does that interest fail to be gratified, though not perhaps in the manner expected. We have to transpose ourselves to the period when they were indited to be convinced that all romantic ideas regarding their contents

[1] The house was enlarged on occasion of his nephew's marriage; and subsequently, in 1617, the gallery, built on the design of Pietro da Cortona, was added by the great artist's grand-nephew, called 'Michael Angelo il Giovane.'

were simply visionary. They have, however, the incomparable value of truth, and, moreover, of truth as perceived and recorded by the most upright mind of the time. In this sense, however dry and meagre, they assume a deeply pathetic interest; for no sadder pictures of public insecurity and penury, and of the joyless and harassed life of the truly great man, while engaged in endowing posterity with immortal works, can be imagined. Least of all do they satisfy what might be thought the more legitimate expectations as regards the subject of art; whether in the form of notes of his own doings, or remarks on the works of others. For even these expectations, as we shall have occasion to show, were alike visionary.

An idea has prevailed among modern biographers that Michael Angelo's art was best approached through the modes of thought and forms of literature which prevailed in his day. This theory, however plausible and attractive, may be at once condemned as fallacious. No two classes of

human intelligence are fed from the same spring, or can be said, in any direct way, to feed each other. As regards especially the art and literature of Michael Angelo's time, there was not even the common condition of each being good of its kind. The literature, with rarest exceptions, was steeped in a rhetorical pedantry devoid alike of nourishment for heart or head: the art, on the other hand, was inspired, as all fine arts must be, by the largest and most philosophical views of Truth as seen in nature. The one represents little more than an empty and artificial fashion; bequeathing writings into which none will now look without weariness: the other is a thing of beauty, which to all cultivated minds remains 'a joy for ever.' Between these two forms of development there was no possible interchange of service. They ran in parallel lines which never met. More allowably may analogy be traced between the great master and a foregone time: in mind, with the author of the 'Divina Commedia,' which he is said to have known by

heart; in hand, with the ancient and mournful Etrurian artists—dwellers in the same land—whose representation of Mercury, as Winckelmann has said, 'was muscled like a Hercules.' As regards the writers of his own generation, and even his converse with most contemporary artists, 'his mind was like a star, and dwelt apart.' No man had less of that self-consciousness and self-love too often mistaken for self-knowledge; but no man more truly and pathetically knew himself to be unknown.

Under these circumstances his character suffered a double injustice; for those who could not rightly measure it in his own day were least able to transmit it justly to posterity. Hence the foolish sayings put into his mouth, and the mean deeds credited to his life by men who thought thereby to do him honour; which, moreover, instead of being honestly investigated since, have not ceased to be repeated even to the present time. We give at once two instances; by way of gauge of the confidence to be reposed

in his early biographers, and which serve also to introduce us to his youth.

Michael Angelo was born on March 6, 1475, at Caprese. He was the second son of Ludovico di Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni, and of Francesca de' Neri, his first wife. His parents returned to Florence soon after his birth, and the child was put to nurse with the wife of a stonemason at Settignano—a colony to this day of stone and marble workers—where his father owned a small homestead. 'There,' he is reported to have said, 'I sucked in, with the milk of my nurse, the chisels and mallets with which I work my figures.' The family were poverty-stricken, and Ludovico, whose education, by his own statement, went no further than reading and writing, obtained his living in an humble capacity in the silk and woollen magazine belonging to a Strozzi. The young Michael Angelo is reported to have been the only one of the family—consisting of four brothers—sent to school, where he soon showed a greater predilection for draw-

ing than for letters. The boy, we may be sure, was father of the man, doing and feeling everything with an intensity incomprehensible to common minds. The control over him could have been no sinecure. It is somewhat contradictory, however, of the supposed respect for art in the breast of a free Florentine citizen, that this control was exercised to the utmost in the endeavour to stifle in the young mind so degrading a passion as the love of art. With all the glories of the *trecento* and *quattrocento*, from Giotto to Ghirlandajo, still uninjured around them, art was evidently looked upon as a trade far inferior to that of silk and wool.

One of the only certain facts known of Michael Angelo's boyhood is his friendship for the painter Francesco Granacci, a lad six years older than himself. This friendship may be safely attributed to the circumstance of Granacci's apprenticeship in Ghirlandajo's *bottega*, whence he is said to have supplied his young friend with the drawings by the master lent to himself. This would account

for the proficiency Michael Angelo was found to have attained, when apprenticed by his father for three years—on the 1st April, 1488, therefore at thirteen years of age—to the same master; a proficiency which reversed the usual conditions of apprenticeship; Ghirlandajo binding himself in this case to pay instead of receiving a premium. Vasari tells marvellous stories of the drawings executed by the young lad at this time, and also of his correcting those by his master. The earliest specimen remaining of his skill is the head of a fawn, stated to have been executed when he was fourteen. This brings up one of those since stereotyped tales, originally given by Vasari, to which we have alluded. It runs thus: The boy had been admitted, with other pupils of Ghirlandajo, to study in the so-called Medici academy—namely, the gardens of the Convent of S. Marco—where a few specimens of antique sculpture had been collected. Here he selected to copy the head of an old fawn, evidently a very inferior work, '*che nella*

bocca rideva.' It was the first time, Vasari states, that the boy had touched a sculptor's tool. Nevertheless, such was his genius, that, departing from the original, he represented the mouth as open, and showing the teeth ;—Vasari having forgotten that a mouth he had just described as laughing must have been already open. Lorenzo de' Medici, the Magnificent, walking round the garden, observed the lad, and joking after his fashion said, 'Thou shouldst know that old people have never all their teeth, but always show a gap somewhere.' He had no sooner passed on than the boy seized a tool, and knocked out one tooth, arranging the gum so neatly that it appeared to have fallen out naturally. This so delighted Lorenzo on his return, that he told the story to all his friends, forthwith adopted the lad, let him eat at his own table, gave him five ducats a month and a peacock-coloured mantle, and bestowed a place in the Custom-house on the father. It is a pity that the repeaters of this tale, which has been reiterated in every life of Michael

Angelo, with the exception of Mr. Wilson's,[1] from that time to this, should not have taken the trouble to walk to the Gallery of the Uffizi to ascertain whether the premisses on which all the sequel hangs were ever true. The fawn's head still remains[2] to tell its own tale, and any one may perceive that in the distinction between the human and animal character which ancient Art always observed in the satyr physiognomy, the two front teeth were purposely modelled wide apart, and that no tooth, by any possibility of dental structure, could have stood in the gap. As to the boy's never having touched a tool before, the head—if by him—equally contradicts that. For Mr. Wilson describes a treatment of the hair with an instrument called 'a drill,' of which a novice was not likely to have known the use. We have just said 'if by him,' for, so ordinary and commonplace is this ugly object that one is tempted to doubt whether it can be by the great

[1] *Life and Works of M. A. Buonarroti*, by Charles Heath Wilson, 1876.

[2] In the Sala delle Iscrizioni.

young hand at all; the more so when comparing it with the bas-relief, called the Battle of the Centaurs,[1]—representing a confused and struggling mass of youthful figures, and believed to be of the same early date,—which proclaims its illustrious origin in forms as indubitable as they are marvellous. Other reported early works have vanished as utterly as the colossal figure in snow, executed by order of Piero de' Medici—Lorenzo's degenerate son—in 1494; while, if the angel, bearing the candelabrum on the shrine of St. Domenic at Bologna, be by him, it is but as the 'ugly young duck' to the swan that was to be.

We are thus brought to the period of one of his earliest dated letters, addressed to Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de' Medici—July 2, 1496—on Michael Angelo's arrival for the first time in Rome. This letter is important as serving to refute the other tale

[1] The work itself gives no authority for the name—no Centaur being seen, and only the hind-quarters of one horse visible below.

alluded to, and which seriously compromises the young sculptor's honour. This concerns the statue of a Sleeping Cupid by him, which, by Lorenzo di Pier Francesco's suggestion and Michael Angelo's consent, is stated to have been purposely buried, so as to give it the look of age, and then taken to Rome and passed off for an antique. As such it was sold by a dealer—Baldassare dal Milanese—to Cardinal Giorgio Riario, for two hundred ducats; the dealer having paid Michael Angelo thirty ducats for it. Lorenzo di Pier Francesco had given him letters of introduction to Rome, and among others to this very Cardinal, and in this letter to him the young man thus reports an interview :—

'Only to advise you that we arrived safely last Saturday, and I went immediately to the Cardinal, and presented your letter to him. He appeared to see me with pleasure, and wished me directly to go and see certain figures, which took my whole day, so that I did not deliver your other letters. Then, on the Sunday, the Cardinal came to the new

house' (a palace he was building), 'and asked me what I thought of the things I had seen. I told him what I thought, and certainly they appeared to me very fine. Then the Cardinal asked me if I had the heart to do something fine. I replied that I could not do anything very great, but that he should see what I could do. We have bought a piece of marble, the size of a figure, and on Monday I shall begin to work.[1] Then I gave the letter to Baldassare' (the dealer), 'and asked him for the "Bambino" (the Cupid), and said I would give him back his money. He answered me very roughly that he would sooner break it into a hundred pieces; that he had bought it, and that it was his, and that he had letters to prove that he had satisfied him who sent it him, and never dreamt of having to give it up. And he complained much of you' (Lorenzo di Pier Francesco), 'saying that you had spoken

[1] In a subsequent letter to his father—July 1, 1497—it appears that either this commission came to nothing, or that he was never paid for it.

ill of him. Some of our Florentine friends here have tried to make us agree, but have not succeeded. Now I think I shall make interest with the Cardinal, which I am advised to do. Whatever follows you shall hear.—Michelagniolo in Roma.'

We must add that Vasari continues the story by stating that before Michael Angelo left Florence, the Cardinal had, to his great anger, discovered the deception, and had privately sent a person to Florence who ascertained that the work, thus passed off on him as an antique, was by that young sculptor. If that were true, it is hardly necessary to point out that for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de' Medici, who had suggested the fraud, to give a letter to the Cardinal, and for Michael Angelo, who had consented to it, to present it, was the one to send, and the other to go straight into the lion's mouth. Also that the Cardinal was not likely to have kindly received, and wished further to employ, a young man, his acquaintance with whom had commenced so inauspici-

ously. But setting aside these circumstances, it is evident by the questions he asked that the Cardinal had never seen a work by Michael Angelo at all. Strange to say, all writers, from Vasari to Herr Grimm and Signor Gotti, express the utmost indignation that the dealer should not have shared the unjust spoils with the sculptor; forgetting that it was the Cardinal, and not Michael Angelo, who was cheated. Further, if true, what Vasari states, that the Cardinal forced the dealer to refund the two hundred ducats, and retake the Cupid, there were no spoils to divide. What Michael Angelo's reasons for wishing to buy back the statue might be, it is impossible now to say—perhaps to offer it to the Cardinal. But it is apparent that if the story were true the Cardinal was the last man he would have asked to assist him to an accommodation with his accomplice. Vasari's mantle seems to have fallen more particularly on Herr Grimm, whose mode of weighing evidence may be illustrated by his remarks on this very letter, published first by himself.

How livelily,' he says, 'are we led by these few lines into the company of people who have thus fallen out in the purchase of a statue. An angered great man—an enraged and deceitful dealer—and all this forgotten by Michael Angelo in comparison with Rome! Michael Angelo rushes through the city, so engrossed by the works of Art that he neglects to give his letters of introduction!' It requires certainly nothing short of Herr Grimm's discernment to discover in this matter-of-fact letter either a '*geärgeter hoher Herr*,' or a sentimental Michael Angelo, or even people who have fallen out in purchase of a statue. The clue to the real story is beyond us now, but it is easy to see that the letter upsets the story Vasari had coined. We have dwelt on these two tales the more, in order to warn the reader against all such contemporary accounts of this great man as give, in the same breath, silly sayings, dishonourable imputations, and fulsome adulation. Nor do the Italians, even now, take the commonest trouble to do him justice.

They repeat the same discreditable statements, and yet weary us with '*quel divino!*'

We forbear to expatiate on what would now appear the extraordinary hallucination of imagining that a work by Michael Angelo could be mistaken for an antique. No powers of criticism existed at a time when such specimens of ancient art as were unearthed in Rome—and those of an inferior kind [1]—were prized, not for any merits of their own, but as illustrations of the classic writings then in vogue. Without believing the flippant and disparaging comments on classic sculpture put into Michael Angelo's mouth, there was no one less amenable to its influence than 'the great Barbarian,' as John Gibson, comparing him with Phidias and Praxiteles, justly calls him.

To return to the Letters. Properly to understand them it must be borne in mind that we have here to do with a man of the simplest and even most penurious habits—with the offspring of an obscure family (for

[1] The group of the Laocoon was not excavated till 1505.

all connexion with the Counts of Canossa is now proved to have been baseless), which, till the fruits of his labour propped them up, were as poor as they were illiterate—with the citizen of a Republic where all were more or less shopkeepers and men of business, and where no man trusted his neighbour—with the member of a State where life, liberty, and property were at the mercy of foreign invasion, intestine treachery, and sweeping pestilence—with a moralist to whom this *cinque cento* period, which his own great works have helped us to view through highly-coloured glasses, was a sad and sordid scene, perpetually vexatious to an upright conscience and a great heart—and finally, with one whose letters on the most matter-of-fact topics, addressed principally to his own family, were penned without a thought of style or effect, yet so unmistakably true to himself that his words go straight and strong like the stroke of his hammer.

To give an epitome of his private

character we must quote a few of these family letters in which it comes prominently to light. Affectionate and true, impetuous and abrupt, alternately patient and impatient, and strong alike in all moods, we here trace by turns the dutiful acts of a pious heart, the short angers of an irascible temper, and the deep wounds of a generous spirit. The subjects treated are small matters of business; notices of little sums sent by him to be deposited with a certain '*Spedalingo*' (head of an hospital), or invested in small holdings of land—'*poderi*'—with many a caution to look well, before purchasing, to the goodness of the soil: while through all this appears an unceasing care for the welfare and advance of his family, and a perpetual contention with their follies and ingratitude. They were evidently, father and brothers, people of the most ordinary natures: taking all from him, and believing all against him; he, on the other hand, equally outspoken whether in affection or in wrath. The father got entangled in a

lawsuit—the bane of the time—which gives Michael Angelo great anxiety — '*gran passione*' — 'for I know that with these notaries one must lose in every way, for they are all thieves.' But he begs his father not to spare his (Michael Angelo's) money. 'And if you want more, take all you want, for as much as you require, so much am I ready to give; even if you spend it all. And take care of your health, and give up "*la roba*" (the things in dispute), rather than suffer anxiety; for you are more dear to me, alive and poor, than all the gold in the world would be to me if you were dead.'

We turn over a few pages, and the tone changes. Evidently the father had gone about Florence accusing his noble son of robbing him, and Michael Angelo turns another side to us: 'Call aloud' ('*gridate*'), he writes, 'and say what you please of me, but do not write me any more of it, for you prevent my working; and I have still to make up that which, for the last twenty-five years, you have had of me. I did not

wish to have said this, but I cannot help saying it.'

With his brothers it is the same; his hand and heart are ever open to them, giving counsel and money, and helping them to employment. From the midst of the work on the Sistine Ceiling, September 1510, he hears that a brother is ill. 'Dearest father, your last letter has given me "*grandissima passione*," hearing that Buonarroto is ill. As soon as you get this go to the Spedalingo, and make him give you fifty or a hundred ducats, and take care that Buonarroto is provided with everything he needs.' He excuses himself for not instantly starting for Florence, but the Pope is gone to Bologna, and he cannot quit Rome without leave. 'Nevertheless, if Buonarroto be worse, I will take post and be with you in two days, for men are worth more than money.'

And again, when the cruel sack of Prato by the Medici had shed terror throughout Tuscany, and Florence itself was threatened

by the Spaniards, he urges his family to seek some place of security, and leave everything: 'for life is worth more than *roba*, and if you have no money to move with, go to the Spedalingo and take what you want, and if I were you I would take all the money the Spedalingo holds of mine, and I would go to Siena, and engage a house and remain there till things right themselves. . . . And do not trouble yourselves about public matters—either in word or deed—but do as you would in the Plague, and be the first to flee. No more. Tell me as soon as you can, for I shall be in great anxiety.'

In return for years of much thought and care for his family, he discovers that his brother Buonarroto is keeping an account against him for expenses at Settignano, defrayed from the profits of funds with which he had furnished him. Fiercely does he turn and ask him with whose money he had obtained the money so spent; and whether he has equally kept an account of *that*? remind-

ing him that it is well not to urge the willing horse beyond his speed. And then comes the cry from the heart, 'but you all have never known me, and never will know me.'

From no common experience of ill-requited kindnesses proceed a few sentences in a letter in later years to a friend, the abstract truth of which the givers and lenders of this world, it is to be feared, will even now confirm.

'The poor Ingrate has this nature, that if you succour him in his need, he says that you only gave him what you did not want. If you put him to some employment for his advantage, he says that you gave it him because you did not know how to do it yourself. And all the benefits he receives he makes out it was your interest to bestow. And if the benefits are too obvious for him to deny them, the Ingrate waits till his benefactor commits some blunder to speak ill of him in a plausible way, as an excuse to free himself from the obligation. So it has always happened to me.'

These letters to his family will strike the reader as bearing almost *ad nauseam* upon the subject of money, and Vasari does not scruple to tell, or to invent, odious stories of Michael Angelo's graspingness. But without needing to notice these, the slightest realisation of the character of the period will account for the prominence of this topic. The age was one in which there was no security for property, and no redress for wrong. Gain and revenge were, therefore, the great hinges on which all thoughts turned. Few were rich enough to be honest; fewer to be generous. While Michael Angelo was never too poor not to be both, he also partook of that caution, and even suspicion, natural to those who work hard for their hire, and are liable to be defrauded of it. Nothing exasperated him more, as we see in his generous loan to the aged Luca Signorelli, than to be cheated; unless it were the being himself called a cheat, which, in the matter of Pope Julius's monument, dishonest princes did not scruple to do.

In later years, when he had saved a small independence, we find more general allusion to the manners of the day. Michael Angelo, in search of a wife for his nephew Leonardo, is a very amical chapter. This Leonardo, the only son of his elder brother Buonarroto, was to be his heir, and by the time he was twenty-eight years of age, the grand old uncle was anxious he should marry. For this purpose he sends him a report of all the eligible young ladies he can hear of, sometimes of three at a time. Still, if Leonardo have a '*fantasia*' for one more than another, he invites him to speak out. It is evident that a '*sensale*,' or broker, was applied to on these occasions, and Michael Angelo recommends a certain Messer Giovan Francesco, who, being '*vecchio e pratico*,' can give good counsel. And he admonishes him to remember that there should be ten years between man and wife, and that the lady should be of a good family and healthy, and well-brought up, and rather without fortune than with too much, '*per poter*

vivere in pace;' but above all he reminds him to ask counsel of God, for it is an important matter. And then he reports three more young ladies of whom he has heard—a '*fanciulla*' de' Ginori, and a '*figliuola*' di Cherubino Fortuni, and another of Alamanno de' Medici; but he thinks the Medici woman is rather oldish ('*attempata*'), and subsequently he discovers that the last two are already married! It is but just to add that money is no object in his eyes: on the contrary, he thinks there must be many noble families in Florence, at that time in '*miseria estrema*,' with one of whom it would be a charity for Leonardo to ally himself. 'And being poor, there will be no pride; for thou wantest a wife who will stand by thee, and whom thou mayest rule, and who will not want to live in pomp, and to go every day to feasts and weddings.' And again: 'Look not for dowry, but try to get a wife who will not be ashamed, if necessary, to wash up the soup-plates ('*rigovernar le scodelle*'), and have an eye to family and to

health, and still more to goodness. And as to beauty, as you are not the handsomest youth in Florence, do not care too much about that, provided she be neither lame nor disagreeable. And be not in a hurry till you find something suitable (*'qualche cosa di proposito'*). Hearing that Leonardo has seen two candidates for the place together, and is not quite certain which of the two it was that he preferred, he cautions him not to make a mistake and take the wrong one, which a friend of his once did. And between times he rates him about his handwriting: 'I never get a letter from thee that it does not put me into a fever before I can read it. Where hast thou learnt to write?' This marriage subject goes on for six years; about every other letter beginning with *'circà tôr donna'*— 'about taking a wife:' till at last the nephew pitches upon a *'figliuola'* of Donato Ridolfi, which gives infinite joy to Michael Angelo, who proceeds to do the generous thing; and first he asks whether 'Cassandra' would like a pearl necklace, for he wishes her to appear

as the wife of his nephew; and finally two rings—a diamond and a ruby—are chosen.

That he should make but scant allusion to his art in these letters to his family was but natural. It is evident that they were quite incapable of any real interest in it, and that he knew them to be so. But there were other reasons why no flights of eloquence, no Ruskinian elaborations on this subject, were to be expected from his pen. The true artist talks but little on art; he leaves that to those who know less about it. Even one in the fullest exercise of creative power has but few and rudimental principles on which he proceeds, and these he cannot always define. How a great master accomplishes his finest works is not more a riddle to the uninitiated than a mystery to himself. Had Michael Angelo been President of the Royal Academy, we doubt whether, in the sense of art, his lectures would have been worth much. At all events he seldom gave utterance on the subject, and when driven to do so by the pedantry which occasionally challenged him, he so far accom-

modated himself to the prevailing tone as to talk what we now feel to be farfetched and unreal.[1] We have alluded also to reasons why this great master was not likely to say much about the art of his contemporaries. This is only explicable by the peculiar nature of his own æsthetic instincts, of which we must here risk a short analysis.

The art of Michael Angelo is one difficult broadly to define, unless by negatives; not religious, not romantic, not classic, not even strictly Italian. In violence and exaggeration it may be said sometimes to 'touch the brink of all we hate.' Nevertheless, it stands alone as the expression of the grandest and most energetic individuality the world has ever known. Michael Angelo had pre-eminently '*les défauts de ses qualités.*' He scaled heights inaccessible to others, and bare of all but sublimity; but he left the slopes uncultivated. He loved difficulties, but,

[1] See *Manuscrit de François de Hollande. Dialogue sur la Peinture dans la Ville de Rome* (between Michael Angelo and Vittoria Colonna), published by Count Raczynski in *Les Arts en Portugal.*

while almost universal in power, he was the reverse of universal in scale; being only greatest in that which is greatest. The larger with him did not include the lesser. He was not like Nasmyth's steam hammer, which can crush a rock, or crack, without crushing, a filbert. He worked in a rarefied atmosphere where few of those common things which delight us in the works of his contemporaries could grow, or would have been in keeping with their surroundings. His grand creatures are not human enough to have buildings or trees behind them, or daisies or colombines at their feet. There is no sign in his art that he loved the face of his own beautiful land. He gives no record of her opal and translucent skies; of her lakes which sparkle with gold and silver, or of the distant objects that shine like jewels of light. Condivi says that Michael Angelo saw beauty in everything; in a beautiful horse, or dog, or hill, or wood, or plain; selecting beauty from all things, as the bee does honey from flowers. But of this

universal apprehension of Beauty there is no evidence either in his works or in his letters; and the term must rather be taken in that mystical Platonic sense of Beauty, not necessarily allied to outward forms, which runs through his poetry. Individual portraiture, indeed, whether of Nature or man, was foreign to him. His own individuality was so overwhelmingly strong that no other individuality could be transmitted through it. In all he represented he infused *himself*; where he aimed to do more like others, as in his one 'Holy Family' in the Tribune of the Uffizi, he has simply no character. That crown of the human figure in which expression especially resides, takes a secondary place in his art. His heads are generally devoid of cerebral development; small in proportion to the figure, and with an absence of individual identity which lends to them a certain abstract solemnity. In one of his sonnets he declares that '*La forza d' un bel volto al ciel mi sprona*;' but this same *forza* never led him to portray a beautiful face as

such. And if the Sibilla Delfica may be quoted as beautiful, she is almost a sole exception. The grandeur of the human form would seem in his eyes to have eclipsed in great measure the part played by the head. Those who draw much from the nude will understand this peculiar result. It will be remembered also that Lady Mary Wortley Montague, in her visits to the female baths at Adrianople, expresses her surprise at the small interest with which the loveliest faces, under those circumstances, inspired her. Michael Angelo lived at a time when the world around him abounded with strongly-marked physiognomies, and when the calendar of ecclesiastical art was full of Saints of rigidly-defined types. But the men who sit on the Medici monuments have no sympathy with our passions and trials—his Saints are beings to whom no suppliant would address a prayer—while his more abstract creations, though called 'Notte e Giorno,' are beyond our power rightly to baptise.

We must also here remember another, and

what may be called a professional reason, for this confined view of the artist's area—namely, that his habits were formed in the sphere of sculpture—the most limited of all forms of art as regards individual expression and external nature ; within which limits, however otherwise opposed to the principles of the antique, he strictly kept. For, through all the pictorial work forced upon him, and in which, in the opinion of posterity, he stands highest, he never ceased to maintain that sculpture was his *profession*, and to follow in great measure its rules. What wonder then that these letters should be bare of allusion to the works of contemporary painters ? All that ground on which they most expatiated —grace, expression, individuality, drapery, backgrounds, and subtleties of taste and colour—he haughtily overstrode. Though unwilling to believe the rude opinion he is said to have expressed on the works of Perugino and Francia, how was it possible that Michael Angelo should care for the ecstatic, sentimental, and most fascinatingly

human creations of such masters, or even for the purity and insipidity of Raphael's earlier Madonnas? If it be true that he declared oil-painting to be only fit for women and people in affluent circumstances—a speech supposed to have been addressed to Sebastian del Piombo, but with good cause doubted now—we may be sure that it was because the subjects to which this vehicle was applied seemed to him far more adapted for playwork than those which issued stern and grand, Minerva-like, from his own brain. At the same time, these letters confirm what he is reported to have said of Raphael. At the end of a long epistle addressed to a Monsignore, as late as 1542—when Raphael had been already twenty-two years in his grave—he accuses him of having, with Bramante, conspired to injure him with Pope Julius II.; adding ironically, 'and Raphael had good reason; for what he had of art he had from me.' It might be difficult to clear the young and graceful painter, so much more socially attractive and less morally

great than his gigantic compeer, of this accusation. The boast attached to it, however, is justified by the acknowledged fact that Raphael's Vatican and later works—the only examples of his art Michael Angelo was likely to admire—were influenced by the sight of the Sistine Ceiling. And that Michael Angelo did unfeignedly admire them is proved by the generous verdict he gave when the money value of the fresco of the Fates in the Pace was called in question.

Thus far, and for some years further, Michael Angelo was a Sculptor. He may be said to have first strongly impressed the Michaelangelesque stamp upon the Pietà in St. Peter's, executed 1499–1500. For the 'Bacchus' before, equally as the 'David' after it, each display more of the body than the soul of his art. He also had commissions for fifteen statues for Cardinal Piccolomini, and for twelve for the Cathedral at Florence; the history of which in both cases seems to typify those ardent commencements, vexatious interruptions, and impotent conclusions which

pursued him like a fate throughout his life. In 1505 he astonished the artists of Florence with his so-called Cartoon of Pisa; created only to be destroyed; but which, even in the fragmentary versions of it which survive, asserts its rank as the greatest feat of modern knowledge and power prior to the Sistine Ceiling. With 1505, however, begins his bondage to Pope Julius II., one of those semi-oriental tyrants who looked upon art only as a means for their own glorification, and on the artist as the slave of their every caprice and passion. But Greek here met Greek; with this difference, that Michael Angelo, while withstanding every indignity offered to himself, rose to every demand imposed on his art. The Pope wanted the finest monument mortal man had ever reposed in, and the artist desired no greater happiness than to execute it. If ever a great heart threw itself with zeal and trust into an arduous undertaking, Michael Angelo's did here; and if ever a great heart reaped the return which, too surely, awaits all such in

this world, whether from princes or brethren, it was again Michael Angelo's.

The design for this monument is too significant of the Pontiff and of the time not to be slightly described. It was destined to occupy a space of 34½ English feet by 23 feet—the size of a large apartment; to consist of two stories, and to be peopled by no less than seventy-eight figures. Some of these were meant to typify victories Julius intended to gain, and provinces he had yet to conquer. Sixteen liberal arts, under the guise of slaves, bound hand and foot, were intended to express the far-fetched idea that with the death of this Pope they returned to the captivity whence he had withdrawn them. The Pontiff was to lie above, supported on one side by the Prophet Moses, and on the other by the Apostle Paul; the two combined being interpreted as forming one Julius. Two angels were further to be in attendance for different functions—the one to bewail the loss to earth, the other to rejoice over the gain to Heaven. This design, the main

features of which were dictated, there can be no doubt, by the Pope himself, did not contain one single Christian sentiment. Repentance, humility, and heavenly hopes gave place to pride, blood-thirstiness, and self-laudation. And except as the symbol of a vain and violent man—the fit representative of a worldly church—no one truth would have been expressed by it. The course of its execution harmonised with the character of its intention. Begun by vanity and selfishness, it was stopped by superstition, and eventually sacrificed, both monument and artist, to bad faith. Those who coveted Michael Angelo's share in the pontifical favour, insinuated that a speedy death awaited one who watched the progress of his own tomb. The temporary bridge which, for this very purpose, had connected the studio with a covered passage leading to the Vatican, was suddenly withdrawn; the sculptor, hitherto free to enter His Holiness' presence, was rudely denied, and Michael Angelo in towering fury quitted Rome.

This fact has been told over and over again by his biographers, but we have here the insulted sculptor's own unvarnished version, in a letter from Florence to Giuliano San Gallo in Rome, of May 2, 1506. Those who know something of the large current expenses required for a work of this magnitude will comprehend the injustice and the indignation.

'Giuliano! I have heard by your letter that the Pope has taken my departure ill, and that His Holiness is now ready to deposit what we had agreed upon, and that he wants me to return, and not to doubt about anything. Regarding my departure, it is true that on Holy Saturday I heard the Pope say, speaking with a jeweller while at table, and with the master of the ceremonies, that he would not spend one *baiocco* more, either on small stones or on great, which took me much by surprise. However, before I left, I asked His Holiness for a supply to continue the works. He told me to return on Monday. And I did return on Monday, and

on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, and on Thursday, as he was well aware. Finally, on Friday morning, I was turned away, that is, hunted out; and he who told me to go said he knew me, but that such were his orders. Whence, having heard those words on the Saturday before, and seeing their effect, I fell into great desperation. That, however, was not the sole cause for my departure. There was another reason, on which I do not choose to enter. Suffice it that I was led to think that if I remained in Rome my monument would be wanted before that of the Pope; and that was the cause of my sudden flight.'

The Pope despatched successively five couriers after the infuriated artist, but Michael Angelo kept the start he had gained, and arrived safe on Florentine territory, whence he sent haughty answers to all the Papal commands for his return and promises of better treatment. So pressing were these that the Florentine State was drawn into the contest, and Pier Soderini, the Gonfaloniere,

is reported to have said to him, 'Thou hast tried an experiment with the Pope, on which no King of France would have ventured. We are not going to war on thy account, therefore prepare to return to Rome.' Meanwhile the Pope had commenced the monumental programme, and assisted by French treachery had taken possession of Perugia and Bologna. To Bologna accordingly Michael Angelo at length proceeded, supplied with a safe conduct, and invested with the character of a legate from the Signory; there he made a proud submission, and received the order to execute a statue of Julius, 14 feet high, in bronze. This was a new art for him, and after what became the usual protest, that it was not his profession, he set to work. The statue cost him two years' labour, and two successive castings. The metal was provided from a bell in the Bentivoglio tower, and from a gun belonging to the city; both circumstances calculated to provoke retaliation. The metals assorted together as ill as the Pope and the Bolognese, and the surface

of the statue turned out so unfavourably that immense additional labour fell on the sculptor. At length, on February 21, 1508—astrological observations having pronounced that to be an auspicious day—the statue was hoisted above the great entrance of S. Petronio, amidst the ringing of bells, and sound of pipe and drum. But the usual fate awaited both artist and work. There remained to Michael Angelo, after paying all expenses—as told in his letters—but a surplus of four and a half ducats—about twenty-five shillings; nor did he ever obtain one farthing more from the mean and ostentatious Pontiff. Three years later, alsò, on the return of the Bentivogli, the statue was hurled from its place, no longer to the accompaniment of festive sounds, but with every indignity and expression of contempt;[1] and sent to Ferrara, where Duke Alfonso metamorphosed it into a gun, which he called his 'Julia.'

[1] To break the fall of such a mass of metal from a height of 30 feet, straw and fascines were spread; but the enormous weight left a mark on the stones below, which may be seen to this day.

So distressing were the circumstances under which Michael Angelo lived at Bologna during the execution of this statue—with anxiety as to its completion, with the enemy more than once at its gates, the plague raging, and his family perpetually pressing for help—that it is no wonder he fell into those habits of self-neglect and penury, which never after departed from him. It was from Bologna he wrote that it was impossible for him to receive his brother Gian Simone, 'because I am here in a wretched room, and have only bought one bed, on which four persons sleep.'

And again: 'I suffer the greatest discomforts and extreme fatigue, and do nothing but labour night and day, and have endured such toil and hardship that if I had to begin again, I do not believe my life would hold out.'

After this episode of all work and no pay —and his last letter from Bologna is dated February 18, 1508—Michael Angelo returned to Florence, the city he loved best;

free from the jealousies and treacheries of Rome, and in a healthier climate. Here commissions to be finished, and the execution of the great mural picture from his Cartoon, in the Council-hall, awaited him. But his evil genius never ceased from troubling. Hardly was he domiciled, and happy in more congenial labours, than an order from the Pope summoned him imperatively to Rome. Michael Angelo's mind was like a beautiful engine—no sooner had it begun to work, with all its complicated parts in harmonious action and equal play—showing the marvels it could achieve—than a rude and ignorant hand interposed, to stop or reverse it. What the constant fret must have been on one who, both as man and artist, was bent on accomplishing what he had undertaken, can now be only feebly imagined. Plenty of evidence remains to show that it was the interference with his pledged honour more than with his promised gain, that so sorely tried him. At the same time the material inconvenience and loss had also to be con-

sidered. The munitions of the sculptor's art were collected, even in Italy, at great cost; the skilled workmen difficult to procure; some designs were half finished, others just begun; all had to be abandoned and scattered. The same had occurred two years before at Rome. Mountains of marble, which he had spent eight months at Carrara to obtain, and which half filled the Piazza of St. Peter's, remained lying about, to be plundered and injured; workshops that had swarmed with workmen; a house he had furnished for them at his own cost, stood deserted, 'and all that I had left behind fared ill.' But he had learned the futility of resistance, and the Pope's orders were obeyed. If his submission had been assisted by the secret hope that the works of the monument were to be resumed, he was soon undeceived. The Pope had '*mutato d'oppenione*,' and was now full of another scheme intended to glorify himself in life instead of after death.

We here approach the painting of the

Sistine Ceiling—the greatest feat to which modern art has risen. The history of this undertaking is said to have sprung from odious motives. In Mr. Wilson's words, 'There is no baser story in the history of art, than that Bramante, hating Michael Angelo, urged the Pope to employ him as a painter, so that all men might witness his failure.' But beyond the fact that 'envy, hatred, and malice' held their saturnalia unrestrained in those times, we fail to see the motive that was worth so doubtful an end. The usual protest was made by Michael Angelo that it was not his profession, and it is added that he earnestly recommended the commission to be given to the youthful Raphael. But this is not credible; for Raphael only came to Rome about the middle of 1508, and gave no evidence of his power to grapple with grand mural decorations till 1511.

The world is indebted to the indefatigable labours of Mr. Wilson for the light now thrown, technically as well as historically,

upon the frescoes of the Sistine Ceiling. He was able to adopt the only sure mode of solving questions and refuting assertions, by mounting to a level with the ceiling itself. From 'the tall and tremulous scaffold' which he obtained permission to erect, he therefore gives forth facts and data which admit of no contravention.

According to an entry in Michael Angelo's own writing, it has hitherto been believed that he began to work on the Sistine Ceiling on May 10, 1508. A little reflection, however, shows this to have been impossible. Michael Angelo reached Rome from Florence at the soonest at the end of March, or beginning of April 1508; he was, as we have seen, still at Bologna on the 18th of February. No time, it may be believed, was lost in receiving and submitting to the Pope's orders. The next step would be the general design for the space. This would be more rapidly accomplished by Michael Angelo than by most painters; but, in this case, two designs were prepared, and suc-

cessively submitted to His Holiness. For Julius's first order was that the decorations should consist only of the figures of the twelve Apostles in the lunettes, the rest of the ceiling to be filled up with ornamentation. The artist states in a letter that he tried this scheme, and was dissatisfied with the poverty of the effect; and we can imagine how utterly alien to his feeling and capacity was any plan involving graceful and florid decoration. Upon which the Pope gave him liberty to please himself, and the design, ultimately adopted, was the result. Then would follow the erection of a scaffold. This task was entrusted to Bramante, who did the work without consulting Michael Angelo, and suspended a platform by ropes passed through holes in the ceiling. The practical artist asked him how these holes were to be filled up when the platform should be removed, and himself undertook to erect a scaffold which was built from the ground. Two structures, accordingly, each supplying a platform or 'deck' 130 feet long

by 45 wide, and nearly 60 feet from the ground, were successfully reared—the one necessarily removed before the other could be put up. All this was required to take place before the commonest preparation of the surface of the ceiling could be commenced. This preparation consisted in two coatings of plaster—the one, coarse and rough; the other, the fine and smooth *intonaco* on which the painter was destined to work. This last could not be applied till the rough coating was dry, a process which usually required a month. Meanwhile studies had to be prepared, and, when the space could be accurately measured, cartoons got ready, and all the necessary staff of workmen and assistants engaged. It is obviously impossible therefore that Michael Angelo could have commenced the actual fresco work on May 10; in other words, in at most six weeks after leaving Florence, and the words must be understood as applying only to the preliminaries of the undertaking. We may therefore dismiss this idea,

and with it the endlessly repeated version—repeated even by the Editor of the Letters, Signor Milanesi—of twenty months (and less) from May 10, 1508, to All Saints' Day, November 1, 1509, for the entire execution of the stupendous work.

It is evident that in the absence of all dates to many of the Letters, those suggested by the Editor are often strangely incorrect. A slight comparison between the letters at this time to the father, which are undated, and those to the brother Buonarroto, which were endorsed at the time in that brother's handwriting with date of departure from Rome and arrival in Florence—a slight comparison, we repeat, will show how inveterately the old stereotyped ideas have stood in the way of the Editor's clearer sight. Michael Angelo writes from Rome, July 24 1512: 'Buonarroto! I have no time to reply to yours, and even had I time I could not answer decidedly till I see the end of my matters (*cose*) here. But I shall be this September in Florence, and will do all I

can for you, as I have done hitherto. I fag more than any man who ever lived; out of health, and with the greatest fatigue; and yet I shall have patience to come to the desired end. So you also may well have patience for two months, being ten times better off than I.—Michelagniolo, Scultore in Rome.'

And again, August 21, 1512: 'Buonarroto! I have had your letter, to which I reply briefly, not having time. About my coming to Florence, I cannot come till I have finished my work, which I hope to finish by the end of September, but it is so great a work that I cannot reckon within a fortnight or so. It is enough that before All Saints I shall be with you, if I do not die in the meanwhile.'

And thirdly, September 18, 1512 (we give most of this letter as it is characteristic):—

'I heard by your last that *la Terra* [the Florentine territory] was in danger, which gave me *gran passione!* Now it is said that

the house of Medici have entered Florence' [they had entered actually on September 12, 1512], 'and that all is settled; which makes me think that the danger is over—that is from the Spaniards—and I no longer think that you need leave. Nevertheless, remain quiet, and do not make friends or familiars of any one, except of God. And speak of no one, either well or ill, for who knows the end of these affairs? . . . I tell you that I have not a groat' (*un grosso*), 'and that I am, so to say, shoeless and naked; I cannot get my due till I have finished the work, and I suffer the greatest hardships and fatigue. . . . I will soon be with you, and nothing shall be wanting that I will not do at All Saints, if it please God.'

Now for the dateless, but evidently coincident letters to his father: 'I shall come when I have finished my *pittura*, which will be in two or three months.' (Letter 12.)

Again: 'Dearest father, I understood by your last that the Spedalingo has ill-used you. Have patience and pretend not to see

till I return and settle everything. I reckon to have finished within two months, and then I shall come. . . . Pray to God that my work may have a good end.' (Letter 13.)

Again: '*I have finished the chapel that I was painting*' [italics are ours], 'and the Pope is well satisfied, but other things do not succeed as I reckoned—the fault of the times, which are very contrary to our art.' [Doubtless the want of pay.] 'I shall not be able to come this All Saints, because I have not that which I want, in order to do that which I wish.' (Letter 15.)

It is strange that these last three letters to the father, evidently at about the same time, bearing exactly on the same subjects, and pointing to the same particular date—All Saints—as those to his brother, should be coolly assigned by the Editor to September and October 1509; thus involving the solecism of making Michael Angelo state that he had finished the chapel in October 1509, when three years later—September 18, 1512—a date confirmed by the entry of the

Medici and other historical evidence—he writes to his brother: 'I cannot get my due till I have finished the work.' This obstinate adherence to the old dates is simply to make them square with the old stories, in which the utmost confusion is easily perceived.

Both Vasari and Condivi assert that the ceiling was uncovered and exhibited on All Saints' Day, within twenty months after its commencement, but each dwells on the Pope's impatience being so great, that when half ('*la metà*') was completed, he insisted on its being so far exhibited, and was the first to come, before the dust occasioned by the removal of the scaffolding was laid. In confirmation of this, a letter to the brother, equally without date and endorsement, has this passage: 'I am here the same as usual, and hope to finish my picture in the course of this week, *that* is *the part that I have begun*, and as soon as I have uncovered it, I hope I shall get money, and leave to come to you for a month.' (Letter 81.) Thus we see that there was an *intermediate exhibition*.

When that took place, no document has yet proved; probably some time in 1510, when Raphael imbibed those impressions which influenced his yet uncommenced work in the Vatican. The early biographers, with their careless inaccuracy, doubtless confounded the exhibition of the half with that of the whole, and seized upon the date of All Saints to give a colour of precision to their tale of twenty months. If further evidence were needed to dismiss this idea, it is furnished by a note in the last edition of Vasari, which proves that the scaffolding was still standing in 1512.

It is now ascertained by Mr. Wilson's researches that the real commencement of Michael Angelo's pictorial labours could not have been earlier than September 1508; a signed document showing that he was in Florence on the 11th August of that year. when, in all probability, he himself engaged such assistants as he considered competent for the subordinate labours of the ceiling. But we go further still, and doubt the whole

story of Michael Angelo's ignorance of the art of fresco—of his consequent engagement of such '*frescanti*' as could teach it him—of their utter failure (though that is the only credible part), and of his immediate and rude dismissal of them, even to barring the door of the chapel against them. That he had assistants from Florence in the persons of Bugiardini and Jacopo l'Indaco, there are letters to prove. But so far from being able to teach him the art of fresco, Bugiardini, older than himself, was then only known as an assistant to Mariotto Albertinelli, while of the other individual no painter's dictionary contains any mention. Writing to his father he says: 'Jacopo l'Indaco, the "*dipintore*," whom I had come from Florence, has left me in these days; and because he complained of my affairs here, I suppose he will also bewail himself in Florence. But turn a deaf ear ("*fate orecchi di mercatanti*"), for he was wrong in a thousand ways, and I might complain greatly of him.' (Letter 10.) This letter is dated January 27 (no year);

therefore, granting even that it was in 1509, Jacopo had been several months with him. But the real point of inquiry is why Michael Angelo should have needed inferior painters to teach him the art of fresco at all! He had been the apprentice of Domenico Ghirlandajo, the greatest *frescante* of them all, while that master was engaged on the walls of S. Maria Novella; he had studied the works of Masaccio in the Carmine; he had voluntarily undertaken to execute a gigantic fresco on the wall of the Council Chamber at Florence; his 'Holy Family' in the Tribune—now ascertained by Mr. Wilson to be in oil—shows, at all events, his familiarity with the use of a brush; and lastly and chiefly, the first compartment he is known to have executed on the ceiling—namely, the 'Deluge'—shows a perfection of execution greater even than that of Ghirlandajo himself.

It is true that Michael Angelo did his utmost to decline the commission, and pleaded, what was true, that painting was not his profession. But when we remember the many

unfinished commissions that were pressing on him, and his experience of the Pope's tender mercies as a patron, there were reasons enough why he should avoid such a task. Nor could the flat, perpendicular wall of the Council Chamber he was prepared to cover, be compared in difficulty with an ill-constructed, coved ceiling of very uneven surface, where he had to lie on his back at the height of 60 feet from the ground, and could never, while the scaffold stood, take that general view of his work so indispensable to the artist's judgment. True also it is that in a letter to his father he mentions not proceeding to his liking, 'which is owing to the difficulty of the work, and its not being my profession.' (Letter 10.) The old biographers say that he was discouraged by perceiving a mouldy efflorescence which rose on the surface during the winter. This, if true, would account for any amount of depression in the artist's temperament. The task, also, of mapping out the ceiling was immense. The problem of suiting his sub-

jects to such a space, and especially to the angles, where the figures had to be painted on a projecting ridge formed by the meeting of two curves—the marvellously foreshortened figure of Haman on the Cross being so placed—this problem was of a kind no painter had attempted before. In all this there was sufficient to account for his complaint of the difficulty of the work, and its not lying within his profession, without the absurd hypothesis of *teachers* being needed for Michael Angelo! Even had he never touched a brush before, the manipulation of chalk, in which he stood unrivalled, would have prepared him for the kindred process of fresco. So similar, also, in general principles of composition, are the arts of fresco and sculpture, that Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed that Michael Angelo attempted little more in this ceiling than could be attained by a sculptor. There are but two ways of judging of this great man—by his own letters, and by Braun's grand autotypes of the ceiling. The first contain no allusion to his want of knowledge of fresco

painting—the others show that he possessed it.

As to the story that he shut himself up alone with his pride, and undertook single-handed every part of the labour, even to that of grinding his own colours, this is hardly worth refuting. Setting aside the facts that he had more than 10,000 feet of surface to cover, and 43 figures to execute—the 'Adam' on the scale of 10 feet high, and the 'Sibyls' on that of 16—there must have been a plasterer to prepare his daily portion of surface. Nor will it be believed that the architectural decorations, the painted border of shells and della Rovere acorns on the tympanums, and the inscriptions, &c., &c., were all executed by the illustrious hand. Assistants for the subordinate parts of such a stupendous work he must have had, and that he made use of them is certain. The autotypes raise grave doubts as to his execution of some of the figures in the spandrils, and Mr. Wilson's close inspection has proved that not only some of these, but parts even of

more importance, bear evidence of another hand.

Cordially do we echo Mr. Wilson's ejaculation of regret that 'so many anecdotes regarding Michael Angelo's operations should have been disseminated, and so little pains taken to verify them when it was comparatively easy to do so.' In all periods of national degradation, such as the Italians have passed through, marvellous stories, once started, cease not to revolve and to grow. The less pardonable that now, in the improved condition of the country, with patriotic motives stirred by the celebration of the Centenary, and opportunities afforded by the publication of these Letters, such worthless gossip, instead of being swept away, should have received fresh currency. Even allowing above three years and the due assistance, the rapidity of Michael Angelo's work remains a sufficient marvel; for we must remember the time to be deducted for the half-way exhibition; the necessary periods of relaxation; the journeys to Bologna to endeavour

to get money from the Pope; and the number of winter days, when, even in Rome, the lime must have frozen in the tanks.

From sketches that yet remain some idea of his system may be gathered. The idea was first jotted down on a scrap of paper in black or red chalk. He then made drawings from the living model about a foot in height, some of them modelled with the utmost finish. From these he or his assistants must have enlarged the cartoons; for, though, in the absence of all surviving traces of such, it has been surmised that he trusted to his eye only in transferring the subject on a larger scale to the wall, yet such a proceeding may be discarded as impossible. On the contrary the finely-understood incised outline—perceptible even in the autotype—shows that—as with all fresco work—a sharp instrument has been passed through the wet plaster along such mark—whether pounced or otherwise—as the cartoon had transferred to the surface. And if any doubt could be entertained as to his having been assisted by cartoons, they are

quite set aside by the fact, first pointed out by Mr. Wilson, that the two nude figures of children which support, in pairs, the brackets of architecture on each side of each Prophet and Sibyl, are invariably the same compositions reversed: thus showing that the same cartoon, first traced on one side and then on the other, served for the two opposite groups.

There was not much to cheer the grand and mournfully attuned mind as it proceeded with its unexampled creations. Indeed, in one sense, the conditions under which Michael Angelo executed the Sistine Ceiling present the highest tribute recorded in history to the power of genius to overcome obstacles. Here was a man surrounded by every form of disturbance and discouragement that could affect the nervous artist-temperament; harassed by his family, distressed for his country—the sack of Prato entered like iron into his soul; he writes: 'If the stones could have spoken, they would have cried aloud' —insulted and defrauded by the man whom

he '*per forza*' (his own words) served; wanting money for his commonest needs—till he turns on his brother with the cry, 'Let no further vexation be given me; I cannot bear one *ounce* more,'—and yet pouring forth reflections from the images in his own mind, unparalleled for grandeur of conception and thoroughness of execution.

And equally in another sense do we perceive in the fate of this great work 'how noblest things find vilest using.' For, from the day when the Ceiling was completed—when it hung aloft pure and bright, the triumph of its own age, and the increasing wonder of posterity—only the coarsest usage and the most barbarous neglect have befallen it. Common workmen have gone over it, as Mr. Wilson has ascertained, with great plasterers' brushes dipped in some deleterious liquid, removing the 'secco,' or dry final touches, and corroding some of the most important parts of the solid fresco. Dust and cobweb hang like a veil between the work and the spectator, and a crust of soot

adds its grime to every part. For, in addition to the usual smoke of tapers which are the bane of all works of art committed to the keeping of the Roman Church, periodical bonfires, lighted at the accession of each Pope—therefore some forty times since the Ceiling was painted—have sent up their smoke from the floor of the Chapel. For it will hardly be believed that with all the twenty courts and four thousand four hundred and twenty-two rooms of the Vatican Palace adjoining, no place has been found to burn the papers accumulated during an Election Conclave but a building sacred alike to religion and art. The autotypes also reveal tremendous cracks in the Ceiling, the result of the peculation and bad materials which have undermined most of the Roman buildings of that and the preceding period.

We have alluded to dry touches '*a secco*' over the solid and immovable fresco. Vasari enters into a gossiping statement—including of course an imbecile joke on the part of Michael Angelo—to the purport that no later

dry operations, either in colour or gold, were, for want of the scaffold, executed by the great artist. As in other instances, however, the work remains to contradict him. Mr. Wilson bears witness that the frescoes are extensively glazed with size colours, especially in the shadows, evidently by the hand of the master, which come off on being touched with a wet finger. Also that gold is seen on part of the thrones of the Prophets and Sibyls, and in the medallions.

We have applied the words 'insulted and defrauded' to the conduct Michael Angelo received from Julius II. during these labours. For, knowing the moral standard by which his contemporaries judged the Painter, we may be less surprised at their reckless exposure of the Head of Christendom himself, whose way of spurring on the willing horse to greater expedition was by threatening to have him thrown from the scaffold, and on one occasion by actually striking him with a stick. This roused the ever ready lion within, and Michael Angelo immediately prepared to

leave Rome, but was pacified by entreaties, and the present, or rather instalment, of fifty ducats. For the Pontiff who is represented as thus using the most gifted man of the age, was not one who, in modern phrase, 'muddled away his money in paying his debts.'

The Sistine Ceiling was completed, as we have explained, on November 1, 1512, and Pope Julius died February 1513. As there was 'no more dying then,' the interdict on the works of the monument ceased, and the executors of the Pope urged its continuance, though on a greatly diminished scale. Accordingly on May 6, 1513, a fresh contract was entered into with the sculptor, by which the structure was only to be seen on three sides, the fourth side being attached to the wall; and the seventy-eight figures curtailed to twenty-eight; the Victories being considerably reduced, and the conquered Provinces very justly dispensed with. Time was given for the artist to gather his staff and materials again about him, and to throw himself afresh into the undertaking; but—only to be again

arrested in it. The fate of the monument followed that of the Medici family in the sense of a see-saw. When they were up, that was down, and *vice versâ*. Leo X. and Clement VII. cared nothing for any posthumous tribute to old Julius, and as little for the peace of mind of the conscientious and excitable artist. Between their two reigns—Leo dying December 1521 and Clement succeeding November 1523—the chair was occupied by a man—Adrian IV.—who drove the Roman Hierarchy to despair by promoting religion and virtue. This change, however, was acceptable to Michael Angelo, who continued the works of the monument in peace. We will finish at once the '*Tragedia del Sepolcro*,' which enters periodically into the drama of Michael Angelo's life, like the Chorus in a Greek play, each time announcing greater woe. It is almost sufficient to state that it dragged its slow length along for no less a period than forty years! The first contract for seventy-eight figures and four façades was signed in 1505; the second for

twenty-eight figures in 1513; the third for six figures in 1532; the fourth for the three figures, of which, ultimately, it alone consisted, in 1545. The first original design, with its four façcades and two stories adorned with bronze bas-reliefs in addition to the wealth of marble figures, had been the signal for the destruction of the ancient Church of St. Peter's, and the scattering of its precious contents. For the Pope who aspired to 'the finest monument in Christendom' could only be satisfied with the largest Temple to contain it. Hence the founding of the modern St. Peter's on the site of the grand old Basilica of Constantine of that name. By a poetic justice, however, the monument, such as it finally became, never found shelter there. Reduced to one façade, one story, and three figures, and of those only one, but that the 'Moses,' by the hand of the master, it hides its diminished head under the roof of an humbler St. Peter's, the small Church of S. Pietro in Vinculi. All these changes and contractions were like so many tightening screws on the

heart of Michael Angelo. He was, as it were, crushed by slow degrees between two sets of tyrants; the Della Roveres, represented by the executors and nephews of Julius II., who perpetually urged on the fulfilment of the work, and the heartless Medici ecclesiastics who as regularly interfered to stop it. For while taking it on themselves to discharge him from his duty to their neighbour in order to engross his labours for themselves—while absolving him despotically from obligations in which they had as little right to bind and loose as in graver matters—these Popes never troubled themselves to screen him from the consequences of such arbitrary acts, or to compensate him for the losses incurred. The munitions of sculpture, as we have said, are costly matters. Michael Angelo worked in season and out of season, whenever time could be snatched from his selfish taskmasters, to expedite the fulfilment of his pledges to the Della Roveres. He took on additional workmen, he laid in a stock of metal for the bronze work, in order, as he says in a letter,

to make a push to complete the monument, and having expended all the money advanced to him by the executors, he drew all he had of his own. But it was only sending good money after bad. The greater the speed in his preparations, the greater the ruin in their stoppage. Funds were swallowed up in labours useless unless completed. His exertions benefited neither his employers nor himself; and meanwhile a formidable reckoning was accumulating against him, ending in what filled his cup to the brim, the threat of a lawsuit.

To follow minutely the history of the frauds perpetrated on Michael Angelo would be beyond our scope. For his cartoon of Pisa, and for the statues commenced for the Florence Cathedral, and for Cardinal Piccolomini, and interrupted by Pope Julius, he received, by his own direct statement, *nothing*. We have seen what profit he derived from the bronze statue at Bologna. For the Sistine Ceiling he received less than the sum agreed upon for the first meagre design of the twelve

Apostles, and that he obtained with the greatest difficulty, and, as it were, by favour. How he managed to scrape together a small independence can only have been the result of self-denial of the most stringent kind. It is true that towards the end of Pope Clement's reign such precarious contracts for payment were exchanged for a yearly stipend—half of which was secured to him upon the dues of a certain ferry on the Po, above Piacenza—but these dues, it soon appeared, had been already given to others, and a defrauded and high-spirited Trivulzi lady defended her rights by starting an opposition ferry! It is sickening to think of the generations who have dwelt on the munificent patronage extended to artists under the Popes of this period. How different the truth as expressed in those simple words: 'The times are very contrary to our art!' And Michael Angelo, as we have pointed out, had pre-eminently the artist-temperament—ever nervously anxious to be freed from anxiety. For this end he even professed himself ready to own himself in the

wrong rather than be entangled in the toils of the law—then-a-days only favourable to those who bribed highest. In a letter to a friend, 1524, he expresses himself willing 'to suppose myself to have pleaded, to have lost, and to be ready to make restitution, so as only to be relieved from this distress.' Those who would interpret such a proposition as evidence of guilt, know little of that sensitive nature which made the harassed man exclaim 'I die with vexation.'

Nor does the history of art supply any consolation by the new commission which first superseded the old ones. Leo X. had conceived the desire to complete the façade of S. Lorenzo, where his father was buried. The first artists, including Raphael, were invited (1516) to compete in designs, and Michael Angelo ordered to join the number. Again, it was 'not my profession,' and nothing could be truer. He had given no proof of architectural skill, and if the design preserved in the Uffizi be by his hand, it shows either that his fellow-competitors knew less

of architecture than himself, or the Judges least of all, for his design was preferred. He had now to master the details of an entirely new art, and this again consigned him to the wilds of Carrara. For with architecture, as with sculpture, it was the usage of the times that the artist should himself be stationed at the quarry to superintend excavations and direct first blockings out. Michael Angelo was well known at Carrara, where some of the blocks for Julius's monument were still in course of preparation, and was on friendly terms with the proprietor, the Marchese Massa. But his evil genius was ever at hand. In the perpetual jealousy between the Italian States it was decided by Leo X. that the opening of new quarries on Tuscan territory would ensure the double advantage of benefiting Florence and impoverishing Massa. Accordingly, after the excavation and shaping of the materials for the façade had effectually commenced, orders were suddenly given to abandon Carrara, and break new ground on the bare mountain

sides of Serravezza, above Pietrasanta, to which there was not even a road. Sorely against his will, and with many a growl, he betook himself to the ungrateful task; though, as the façade was to be completed in a given time, he naturally retained his hold on the Carrara quarries, till those of Serravezza could replace them. The consequence was that he found himself between two fires. The Carrarese resented his opening quarries at Serravezza, and the Pope resented his continuing his contracts at Carrara. Rude letters on the part of the Pope, accusing him of never choosing to work (!) and urging him to proceed faster at Serravezza, and intrigues on the part of the Carrarese to prevent his so doing—the new road, which the great master himself had to make, almost impassable—workmen cheating and going wrong in one place while he was in another—journeys to Pisa and to Genoa to engage boats, the masters of which were bribed to defraud him—all this almost drove him out of his senses. He writes from Serravezza that he is

'racked' by his position. 'I have undertaken to bring the dead to life—to tame mountains—to introduce art into this country. The boats which I hired at Pisa have never come. I believe that there also I have been cheated; and so it is always. Oh! a thousand times cursed be the day and hour that I left Carrara. But I'll return there yet. Nowadays it is a sin to do right.'

The end of all this 'ignominy,' as he rightly terms it, was worthy of the means. After four years spent in these labours he was suddenly superseded by a number of workmen from the 'Opera' of the Cathedral at Florence, then in course of erection, who were sent with orders to take possession of the marbles blocked out for the façade; and these, without one word of explanation, were diverted from their purpose, and appropriated for the pavement of the Cathedral. Thus the work which had interrupted other work was in its turn arbitrarily arrested, and the only evidence left of his four years' toil is a huge marble column, which to this day lies

half buried in soil before the still rough and rubble façade of S. Lorenzo.

We have wearied our readers and ourselves with these wretched details, but they are necessary justly to comprehend the times and the man. Thus thrown out of this ill-befitting occupation, he returned of course to those suspended commissions which weighed upon his spirits—finding time, also, to execute a long-bespoken statue of Christ. This cannot be said to add to his fame. Michael Angelo's peculiar mind could not even approach the conception of that which has been more or less the crucial test of every master—viz. the Divine mind in the human form of our Lord. So entirely did he depart from the commonest rules of tradition, or decorum, as to represent the figure entirely undraped; while we learn from these Letters that parts of the nude suffered great disfigurement from the clumsy work of Urbino, his foreman.

We pass on, however, to a second interruption, in the shape of the Medici monu-

ments, which, at all events, has left a greater compensation to the world. The plan of erecting monuments to his brother Giuliano de' Medici, and his nephew Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, originated with Leo X., but the commission was given to the master by the Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, cousin to Leo X., and afterwards Clement VII. This Pope, who was in so far superior to Papal usages as to object to the sale of Cardinal's hats, had also a juster appreciation of Michael Angelo than Leo's false and effeminate mind had permitted him to form. Nevertheless, he was too true to his race not to be bent on engrossing his services at any cost to him, or to others. Among the expedients resorted to for this purpose, were two of an original kind —the one, a threat of excommunication in case he should work for any one else—the other, a proposal that he should bind himself never to marry, but to take vows of obedience in a religious order. The artist, however, required no such extreme measures to induce him to undertake this, the second great

achievement of his life — commenced in 1520.

Michael Angelo here returned to what he considered his proper calling, and it becomes the more interesting to view him in these strange and stupendous works. He was now between forty-five and fifty years of age —the time when the character has attained its fullest strength. That, therefore, which is impressed on these Medici tombs gives a just measure of his art as a sculptor. But we are here reminded that no outside standard exists by which to judge it. Far from comparing him with the antique, often most falsely attempted, it is the very difference between them which constitutes the character of his works. Having no sympathy for the qualities predominant in Greek art, excepting its fine anatomy, he took, whether consciously or no, the alternative open to an original mind, by departing as far as possible from it. Beauty, Repose, Symmetry, Grace —all, as such—he aimed not at. As little did he affect those particulars belonging to

the picturesque which were reflected in the schools of painting around him. He can, therefore, as a sculptor, be measured only by himself; and in that sense the Medici monuments stand highest among his plastic works —higher even than his 'Moses,' which, however grand, suffers by being brought into comparison with the definite individuality it assumes to portray. But there was as little in the lives of the men here immortalised to require any individuality of delineation, as to inspire one single idea worthy of monumental art. The one, Giuliano, represents the weak side of the Medici race; the other, Lorenzo, the wicked. In one of Michael Angelo's letters, dated April 1526, he simply designates the two seated figures in armour as '*i due Capitani*.' As simply also he mentions 'the four figures on the Sarcophagi,' and 'the four figures on the ground which are Rivers.' One of the Captains—Lorenzo—is in the attitude of profound thought, and the world has fitted him with the term '*Il Pensiero*'—the other Captain says so little that

he is only known by his own name, '*Il Giuliano*.' But as regards the intention of the four nude figures, two and two, male and female, stretched back to back on the sides and wings of each sarcophagus, we have no clue to fill up the blank. The names of Night and Day, Twilight and Dawn, were doubtless bestowed contemporarily, and his well-known sad and beautiful lines in reply to a verse upon the '*Notte*' shows that the master endorsed the idea. But beyond the closed eyes and accessory owl of the female figure, no connexion whatever can be traced between these statues and their appellations. Day and Twilight—so oppositely suggestive—are equally huge, muscular and inactive; Night and Dawn—so poetically diverse—alike massive, supine and mournful. Had they suggested any definite idea, posterity would have baptised them with the equivalent title, for a name will always follow where an idea goes before. As it is, innumerable eyes, including those of Charles V. in 1536, have dwelt upon them; countless minds have

speculated on them; but still they defy analysis, and have lain there for centuries without furnishing a hint of their creator's intention. In no respect are they truer to him than in this. For we return to the conviction that there was in Michael Angelo's intensely subjective mind an absence of all individualising power—as M. Rio expresses it, '*de toute signification nette.*' No one could identify his 'David' without the sling, nor the 'Christ without the Cross,' nor even his 'Moses' without the disfiguring legendary horns. He worked, as before said, in a rarefied atmosphere, where we cannot follow. When upon those august heights he so far partakes of the Divine as to compel homage, due to that which transcends our mental level; but short of that, he presents a void which no secondary qualities exist to cover. It is easy to perceive that the Medici statues are full of faults and incongruities. They lie, for instance, in positions that no human being could maintain for a moment. The male figures are unwieldy gladiators—the female, half male. Still, when

all criticism is exhausted, we only the more reach the estimate of that astounding power which takes our admiration by storm—uninspired by which, these statues would have been simply hideous, or ridiculous.

As to any reference to the deeds of the Medici, or to the bondage and misery of Florence, which some have supposed them to symbolise;—the wicked Lorenzo by the absorption of a guilty conscience; the worthless Giuliano by the feebleness with which he holds the *bâton*, and by the corruption implied by the coin in the other hand; the female figures by a certain expression of weariness and suffering—such ideas may possibly lie at the root of these embodiments, but they are too vague to follow. The four figures, it may be added, spoken of by him as Rivers, and which certainly would not have contributed to the solution of the riddle, were never executed.

In mode of execution these monuments are peculiarly instructive; presenting as they do various grades of completion. The Cap-

tains are finished to the utmost; the *Notte* the same. The other figures are more or less incomplete, and show the stroke of the vigorous tool. In these last it would be vain to look for the marks of those points apparent on every unfinished modern work in marble. The 'pointing instrument,' as it is called, which now, by a mere mechanical process ensures the faithful transfer from the model, or rather from the cast of the model, to the marble, was first invented by our Chantrey. The Renaissance sculptors relied on a more delicate and elaborate process, by means of a framework placed before the cast, whence were suspended plumb lines, from which measurements were taken by compasses. Nor was this plan always resorted to. It is evident, by contracts between Michael Angelo and Carrarese workmen,[1] that the block was often rudely fashioned or '*abbozzato*' at the quarry itself from a mere drawing or small

[1] See *Ragionamento Storico su le diverse gite che fece a Carrara Michelagniolo Buonarroti.* Da Carlo Frediani. 1875.

model, after which the sculptor himself exercised that *tour de force* which consists in actually chiselling away the hard material, guided only by feeling and practice, and carrying, as Michael Angelo was wont to say, 'his compasses in his eye.' No one ever carried these more daringly. An eye-witness[1] has described the fury of that 'chisel'—now only a conventional term as applied to a sculptor—as the great master attacked the marble.

'I may say that I have seen Michael Angelo at work after he had passed his sixtieth year, and though he was not very robust, he cut away as many scales from a block of very hard marble in a quarter of an hour as three young sculptors could have effected in as many hours. Such was the impetuosity and fire with which he pursued his labour, that I almost thought the whole work must have gone to pieces. With a single stroke he

[1] Blaise de Vigenère, a diplomatic agent in Rome, who frequently visited Michael Angelo at his studio at the foot of Monte Cavallo.

brought down fragments three or four fingers thick; and so close to his mark, that, had he gone beyond it, even in the slightest degree, there would have been the danger of ruining the whole.'

This confidence may be partly attributed to Michael Angelo's long enforced residence at Carrara, where the workmen to this day partake of the same fearlessness of stroke. Thorwaldsen used to say that the Carrarese men employed in his studio handled their tools with marvellous facility, 'knocking away the marble like so much cheese.' There is no doubt, however, that in the case of our artist this facility was exercised at the cost of his art, in which malproportions of figures, and miscalculations as to size of block, can often be pointed out.

Besides the few words in his Letters, which we have given, no record appears of the progress of the Medici monuments. In the disturbed state of the Italian world—the sack of Rome—the siege of Florence, and the annihilation of her liberties—the great

hand either ceased to write, or his Letters have been lost. Events followed each other almost as rapidly as they would now. Rome was taken on May 6, 1527, and by the 18th Florence had risen, and the Medici had been driven out. They left discord and dissensions behind them—a state of poverty which culminated in famine and plague, soon to be succeeded by the third of the fell sisters—War. For the siege of Florence by the Papal and Spanish troops for the restoration of the Medici began in the spring of 1529. And here a fresh direction was given to those versatile powers we have been following. The respect of his fellow-citizens was shown by Michael Angelo's appointment to the entire direction and command of the fortifications—a task for which, as proved by the testimony of later times, his clear practical mind was singularly fitted. But not even the common danger could guard against disunion and treachery. Coincident with the great master's appointment was also that to an important post of the notorious Malatesta

Baglioni, who ultimately betrayed the city. And this brings us to a mysterious episode in the life of Michael Angelo, for which at present no satisfactory solution has been found. His own account is that Malatesta frustrated him in his plans for the defence of the city; withdrawing guards where most necessary, and leaving bastions undefended which had been assigned to his care. It was in vain that, from his place in the Council, he denounced the traitor, and pointed out the peril. There were those more interested in deeming him suspicious than Malatesta false, and his remonstrances remained unheeded. Suddenly then, by one of those impetuous impulses which characterised him, Michael Angelo took horse, and, accompanied by one other, passed out of the city by the gate least strictly guarded, called '*alla Giustizia*,' and took his way to Ferrara. A letter of his to a friend, Sept. 25, 1529, gives the following curious version:—

'I departed without saying a word to any of my friends, and in much confusion; having

desired, as you know, by all means to go to France, and having on various occasions asked leave without obtaining it. It was not, however, that I was not determined, without fear of any kind, to see first the end of the war; but that on Tuesday morning, the 21st September, there came one out by the gate of S. Niccolò, where I was at the bastions, and privately told me that if I wished to save my life I ought not to stay. And he came with me to my house, and there dined, and then brought me horses, and did not leave me till he had me out of Florence, showing me that it was for my good. Whether God or Devil, which ever he may have been, I know not.' (Letter 406.)

Here we must leave this strange event. It was the act of one flying for his life—not from the fear of the enemy, as his biographers aver—nor so much from the fear of danger as from the conviction of it. The city could not afford to lose such a man, and though he shared in the public proscription of all who had quitted the walls, yet over-

tures made to him smoothed the way to his return. In two months he had resumed his post at the defences, and is known to have accomplished the task of fortifying the hill of S. Miniato—in which he had been previously thwarted and opposed. The tales, however, of his having harassed the enemy by guns mounted on the belfry of the church of S. Miniato, and of his having invented a mode of resistance to their return-fire by placing packs of wool round the tower—these tales share the fate of others we have instanced. Mr. Wilson, who in this also has resorted to that personal inspection which no Italian had attempted, reports that the belfry, being only eight feet wide, could have held no gun worthy the name; while the use of wool as a protection had long been known in warfare. As little need we enter into the story of the master's having lain concealed in the tower of the church—up to which many a traveller's eyes have been turned with the greater interest on that supposed account. On the first entry of the Medici

into the city all conditions of the surrender were violated, and Michael Angelo, towards whom they were peculiarly rancorous, remained concealed in a friend's house. But Clement VII. soon overlooked the patriot in the artist, who returned peaceably to his studio, and resumed his work.

The chief outlines of his remaining art-career can now be only briefly given. Overlooking minor works which are supposed to have occupied him at intervals, we find him starting for Rome, December 1533, having, at the desire of the Pope, undertaken another part of the original plan for the Sistine Chapel—namely, the great fresco of the 'Last Judgment.' This occupied him nearly eight years, and was uncovered for public view at Christmas 1541. No greater proof can be given of the decay of taste in Italy than the fact that this work was, and is still, extolled above the Ceiling. It is true the hand—now nearly thirty years older—had retained much of its cunning, for the execution in parts is very fine, but the mind had gone still further

away from the standards of taste and fitness. He had become the caricature of himself. The void of grace, individuality, and true expression was now filled up by their contraries. It must be a very ardent admirer of the great man who can discover either piety or propriety in the monstrous figure of the Saviour, whose very action of mercy is turned, by the violence of the gesture, into one of menace;[1] or in the huge masses of muscle and bone which form the Celestial Hierarchy. The figures in the lower part, either being upborne by angels, or dragged down by fiends, display all his power, but its materials are supplied from memory rather than from the study of nature. The fresco, now darkened by soot and largely overpainted by coarse hands, presents a very unattractive object. As Italians have not hesitated to liken Correggio's 'Assumption of the Virgin' at Parma to 'a hash of frogs,'

[1] The uplifted right hand, exhibiting the wound, was the traditional sign of grace to the Redeemed. In this 'Last Judgment' it assumes, on the contrary, the character of reprobation.

an Englishman—Walter Savage Landor—may be pardoned for comparing Michael Angelo's 'Last Judgment' to 'a huge giblet pie.' Would that it had never received worse usage than the hard words that break no bones! But in proportion to the greater facility of access, as compared with the Ceiling, has been the maltreatment it has received. On all occasions of church decorating it has been found a convenient resting-place for ladders, nor has a better scheme for hanging tapestry over the altar been devised than that of barbarously driving iron stanchions into the fresco itself.

Michael Angelo as an architect appears again in a distinct vocation. What he might have done for the façade of S. Lorenzo cannot now be known; but two other buildings—the Sacristy of that church (the Medici Chapel) and the Laurentian Library—remain as examples of his art in Florence. The verdict of posterity has been less unfavourable to the Chapel than to the Library, the interior of which looks, as Mr. Wilson terms

it, 'like a temple turned outside in.' In each of these buildings his plans were interfered with, and his work altered; but no plea of interference can save the artist, in these examples, from the charge of a mistaken code of architectonic taste. While his arrangement of general masses was fine, and his principles of structure sound, he shows an entire misapprehension of the science of ornament as growing out of utility. In the dangerous attempt to be novel he has only introduced poverty of forms, incongruity, and confusion. It is even apparent that here, as in his sculpture, he relied on no standard of scale or proportion, but designed his ornaments by his eye. To the Laurentian Library is traced the foundation of the style the Italians rightly call '*barocco*'—a word which, according to a technological dictionary is 'a musical term applied to a composition where the harmony is false and overcharged.'

The death of San Gallo in 1546, who had, among others, succeeded Bramante as architect of St. Peter's, left the office vacant,

and Paul III. summoned Michael Angelo to undertake it. In no way does our master stand more distinct from his age, and from those who had preceded and were to succeed him in this particular appointment, than in the conditions on which alone he accepted it. He was now seventy-one years of age, and believed that he had not long to live. All ambition, except that of attaining the kingdom of Heaven, had passed away. He wanted little, and he coveted nothing. He wished to work, and especially in the service of God; and, to do so more freely in the midst of a perverse and corrupt generation, he only consented to give his services on condition of their being gratuitous. There was equal piety and wisdom in this; for thus alone could he disarm the envy of his enemies; control the peculation which was the order of the day; prevent interference with his judgment and authority; or resign when he pleased.

The history of this building—'*la maggior machina che abbia sostenuta la terra*'—though

for '*la terra*' we must read '*l'Europa*'—presents a curious succession of varying designs, and what we may call conflicting architectural politics. In the ignorance which prevailed in high places, the fact that the science of architecture was a separate and profound study was either unknown or ignored. Accordingly among those who successively occupied the post of supreme architect of the works of St. Peter's will be found names, illustrious in themselves, but totally unconnected with any previous practice of the art. The work was commenced by Bramante, under Julius II., in 1506, on the site of the ancient Basilica of S. Pietro. The Pope was as impatient with architects as with painters and sculptors. He expected great structures 'not to be built, but to be born.' To this may be attributed the haste—so censured by Michael Angelo—with which the old building, with its columns of antique precious marbles, and its walls partly faced inside with tiles of Corinthian brass, was demolished rather than taken down. Bra-

mante's model enclosed the whole ancient site, and included a grand dome ; but the piers on which this was to be supported were run up too hastily for safety, and by the time both Pope and architect died—the one in 1513, the other in 1514—the work already needed repair. Next succeeded, under Leo X., the painter Raphael, with Giuliano San Gallo and Fra Giocondo da Verona, as his colleagues. San Gallo retired from ill health in 1517, and Raphael and Fra Giocondo both died in 1520. Their six years' reign had been chiefly devoted to making good the defects Bramante had left. Giulio Romano was chosen to succeed his master, but died before tne appointment was completed. Baldassare Peruzzi, another painter, now appears on the scene. His model coincided with that of Bramante as regards the dome; but he judiciously abandoned the form of the Latin Cross and substituted that of the equilateral so-called Greek Cross. He was a man of great ability, and his plan gives evidence of fine taste and beautiful proportions. He died

of poison in 1536. Antonio San Gallo, nephew of Giuliano, followed Peruzzi under Paul III. His model occupied him three years and cost 4,000 scudi. This retained the form of the Greek Cross, with an atrium extraneous to the building, and involved details of florid elaboration, rather of a Gothic than a Renaissance character. Thus six men filled the post before Michael Angelo entered upon it. His model, which was executed in fourteen days, and cost 25 scudi, immediately revealed the man. The atrium was at once abolished—a Greek Cross designed of far larger dimensions than that by Peruzzi, and a dome of far finer proportions, which, with four minor cupolas, and a peristyle and attic supported on fourteen columns, presented a pyramidal mass of the grandest effect. No two masters hitherto employed were so opposite in taste and tendency as San Gallo and Michael Angelo. The one trusted to the effect of a multiplicity of parts and details, the other to colossal size of both. San Gallo's design was calculated to impress the eye

with the sense of a magnitude greater than it actually possessed—Michael Angelo's, with all its grandeur, has the contrary effect. In this verdict the dome must be excepted, which owes its pre-eminence less to its size than to its fine outline and boldly uplifted position. Each preceding designer had planned a dome on the model of that of the Pantheon, which, placed at more than double its present height, would have presented but a shallow effect. It will be wondered how all these varying counsels were compatible with the stationary conditions of stone. But, in truth, each designer accommodated himself to the great central piers Bramante had left; and these may be said to have been ultimately buried by Michael Angelo within the gigantic masses which now support the roof and dome.

The great master held the appointment till his death in 1564. Unlike as with his painting and sculpture, no decline of power was observable. On the contrary it is evident that his knowledge of true architectonic science became, even in the minutest par-

ticulars of construction, equal to this task : the old man being to the last in every respect the soul of the works. That he was also the conscience of them hardly needs assertion ; but a few emphatic lines from one of his Letters may be given. The defective structure of the chief buildings of modern Rome has been alluded to, and the cause is not far to find. Speaking of the corruptions by which surveyors and overseers were bribed into passing inferior materials for the building, 'by which they make friends of those who are my enemies,' he adds, writing to one we should call the clerk of the works : 'Promises, fees, and presents corrupt justice. I, therefore, with the authority of the Pope, beg that from this time forth you receive not a single thing that is not up to the mark ; not even if it came down from Heaven.'

For the last seven years of his administration Pietro Ligorio had been associated with him. At Michael Angelo's death Vignola assumed the higher position, both architects adhering to his plans. Nor is

there reason to accuse Giacomo della Porta, or Fontana, who successively conducted the fabric till 1590, when the dome was completed by relays of workmen night and day, of any departure from the noble scheme. But here the inauspicious figure of Carlo Maderno, called Il Lombardo, steps in, to whom the frustration of the mighty plan was owing. At the same time the Church must take its share of the blame. It appears that Paul V. objected that the edifice—embracing, as it does, a space of nearly six acres—would not contain a sufficient number of worshippers; that Michael Angelo had omitted to provide a balcony whence the Pope could bless the Faithful; and that, though comprehending a far larger area, he had failed to enclose all the consecrated ground which the old Basilica had covered. Maderno was accordingly desired to provide more space, and did it in the only possible way, by adding the long limb which restored the form of the Latin Cross. Further, uncontrolled by any traditions of respect, and as ignorant as his

superiors of what constituted the special beauty of the structure, he erected in place of Michael Angelo's graceful peristyle a high, flat, commonplace, club-house front, which effectually screens from sight the grandest feature of the grandest Christian Temple in the world. Nothing can mask the dignity of the dome when seen from a height, but it virtually disappears from a spectator level with the building. So utterly was the effect destroyed that the sculptor Bernini's purposeless colonnade of crowded columns, which, like the outstretched wings of a bird, divert all attention from the body, became a necessary addition, or rather evil. It was Bernini also who, by Papal order, so far weakened the piers by hollowing out a space in each large enough to admit a staircase, as seriously to threaten the safety of the dome. Thus the ill fate which attended the works of Michael Angelo in all three arts remains here in a petrified form no one can dispute. Bernini's share in the work of deformation did not end till 1690, when the building, which had been

carried on by thirteen architects, during the reigns of twenty-five Pontiffs, and over a period of 184 years, finally assumed its present form.

One more phase of this man's genius remains to be briefly mentioned. We do not say that he wrote Sonnets, for that means little at a time when every Italian of note did the same, but that he was really a great poet. The mind that found nourishment in the works of Dante, and the heart that embraced the teaching of Savonarola, left their reflection in verse to which poets of all nations have accorded a high place. Here and there we are struck with a coincidence of feeling and expression between him and Shakspeare. Such a passage as this, translated by Southey, will recall the Sonnet entitled the 'World's Way.'

'Ill hath he chosen his part who seeks to please
The worthless world. Ill hath he chosen his part.
For often must he wear the look of ease
When grief is in his heart. . . . . .
And ever his own bitter thoughts concealing,
Must he in stupid grandeur's praise be loud;
And to the error of the ignorant crowd
Assent with lying tongue.'

But the comparison soon fails. For Shakspeare is the child of Nature, Michael Angelo the disciple of Mysticism. Shakspeare teems with happy familiar images, for which we seek as vainly in Michael Angelo's poetry as in his art. The one plays with the whole scale of Love's fascinating vocabulary—the other dwells no less perpetually on the yearnings and aspirations of what then went by that name, though, compounded as it was of the transcendental philosophy of Dante, the recondite Platonism of the Academies, and the pedantry of Bembo, it is as different from Shakspeare's genuine thing as black is from white. Very strangely have these expressions been interpreted, especially by modern French analysts, as embodying his love for an earthly object, and that love, owing to female coldness and prudery, unrequited. Vittoria Colonna, the Marchesa di Pescara, a sonneteer herself, is credited with having alone possessed the power to kindle the tender passion in the great master's breast, and yet the barbarity not to gratify it; and a sensational romance has been con-

jured up as little flattering to the parties as it is false and ridiculous in itself. The facts are that a most respected friendship and correspondence existed between an accomplished and high-born lady, past fifty years of age, and the venerable artist, twenty years her senior. Their talk about art was, as we have hinted before, not very instructive; but otherwise their intercourse, as befitted persons of their age, turned chiefly on those sacred topics which, among the purer minds of the time, were suggested by the echoes of the Reformation transmitted across the Alps—topics always more or less occupying Michael Angelo's thoughts. For the chord that strikes the truest sound in his poetry is that of mingled piety and melancholy. It was no misanthropy, as some have averred, or moroseness of temper, which overclouded his great soul. He had seen the triumph of evil too often not to wonder that any could be gay; he was, morally, before his time; he was weary of life; and he lived to be eighty-nine! His portraits present us with

one of the saddest faces that sorrow and work ever furrowed or art preserved; fit illustrations of that plaintive plea so often urged in his later letters, when taxed and worried beyond his strength, '*son vecchio*!'

We shall be thankful to have in some measure succeeded in imparting to others the impression which these Letters have left on ourselves. Impetuous, impatient, and indignant he could be, but all in right time and place; but as to the wifulness and uncontrollability with which he has been charged, his life displays, on the contrary, one course of meek submission of his opinions, wishes, and interests to authority which, by any artist worthy the name, would now be defied with equal contempt and safety. Far, therefore, from endorsing the character which his biographers have given of him, these Letters rather leave the impression of a figure like his own Jeremiah; bowed down with the contemplation of human wickedness and woe—grand, mournful, patient, and weary.

TITIAN

PART I.

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THE late Dean Stanley, in his address to the students of St. Andrews on the 'Hopes of Theology,' directed their attention to the necessity of 'Definition' as an indispensable element in its study and discussion. A similar necessity may be pleaded for another sphere of thought—namely, for that of Art; a domain in which definition is at once more difficult and less important. For not only does the philosophy of art address itself to fewer minds, but, as compared with that of theology, a far lower responsibility, fortunately, is attached to the precision and justness of its canons. It may sound uncourteous to suggest that to this far lower responsibility may be assigned the readiness with which questions of art are treated,

and opinions on it pronounced in modern society. But, whatever the cause, it is undeniable that few topics occupy a larger space of the ordinary conversation of social circles, and that to those who study mankind as well as pictures few are more curious to overhear. The chief characteristic observable in these discussions is a union of timidity and self-mistrust, with what may be termed the very reverse of both; which operates in curiously opposite directions. For if it be very rare to meet with one with the power to advance a really critical opinion—and such all connoisseurs will readily respect—it is far rarer to find another with the discretion to abstain from any opinion at all. In this dilemma each borrows the best ideas he can gather from his neighbour, who, if the truth were known, has obtained them by the same secondhand process himself. In short, the chief result is a faithful illustration of Hans Andersen's fable of the 'Emperor's Clothes'—minus the child. It is only just to add that this unanimous

agreement in what Carlyle would call 'a great sham' has been fostered by a class of modern literature which has reduced, or rather expanded, a limited and profoundly philosophical vocabulary into little better than a fashionable jargon.

For the principles which govern art are, as we have hinted, of a peculiarly recondite nature; not always capable of being defined by the painter himself. That which addresses itself specially to the judgment of the eye, leaves little to be said by a different organ. To the uninitiated the laws which underlie a fine work—what may be called the painter's *reasons*—are not even so much as matters of speculation; for where no difficulty is perceived, no mystery is suspected. This is the natural homage paid by outsiders to the art which is especially bound to conceal its art. Yet, in truth, the painter's craft may be said to be a network of secrets: every part of it—composition, lines, light and shade, masses, and, foremost of all, colour—being based on

subtle and intricate laws, gradually and patiently wrung from the observation of nature.

Gathering, however, the prevalent ideas which float on the surface of society, it would appear that, far from being a matter of study and experience, 'the feeling for colour,' as the accepted term goes, is an instinct belonging to certain races; born with them in the same sense of a natural choice and necessity as eating and drinking, or making a nest. Oriental and southern races are especially credited with this instinct, and the picturesqueness of colour in costume and accessories of life with which they are traditionally surrounded is cited as sufficient evidence of the fact. None will deny the fact that they are thus surrounded with all that a painter's soul loveth, and have been so from time immemorial; the question only is whether these environments have been matters of choice, and attributable to the cravings of an inward sense. For, instinct—to be careful in our own definitions—has its

source, whether in man or animal, strictly from within, and is no further definable than as a psychological fact; whereas the use, the habit, or the knowledge of colour is derived from causes which lie strictly without. Far from the desire for harmonious combinations being implanted by nature in the races we have mentioned, nothing is more certain than that, left to their own choice, they evince no consciousness of it. The Eastern woman before a band-box of gaudy Manchester goods will select a combination which sets your teeth on edge. The Italian peasants who go mechanically through a gallery evince no more apprehension of their great colourists than would one of our own boors. If the *contadino* be rich enough to build his house, he will insult the ineffable harmonies of his native landscape by painting it all over a pale pink, or crude blue; while the Italian washerwoman, or tradesman's wife, just above the peasant class, and therefore above the prescriptions of costume, will on *fête* days rejoice in an exaggeration

of bad taste unequalled elsewhere. Dugald Stewart is said to have instanced the babe as a proof of a natural desire for colour, but of all examples this is least tenable. The babe grasps at the coral, or at a bit of shiny metal, not from any inborn preference, but because it distinguishes such objects most easily. In short, if we must admit the fact of an instinct for colour in any race, it can be only in one which does it little honour —namely, in the appetite for red paint and bright beads which characterises the full grown babe, *i.e.* the Savage.

But how shall we account for the rich harmonies and delightful tones which are actually seen in every accessory of Oriental life? The first step is to turn from all theories of instinct, to those outward causes by which the relative property of colour is evoked. Nothing, we must remember, stands alone in this universe. To reach one thing we must pass through another, and the property of colour, far from presenting any exception to this principle, is a striking

illustration of it. Accordingly the thing in the sense of art, called 'colour,' is never absolute in itself, but derives its value, like the varying lots of human life, from comparison with what is next and around it. The same tint will be bright or dull according to its environments. As a rule, no colour in a fine work will be found so bright as it looks, and inversely no colour in bad or ordinary work will look so bright as it is. A tawny sail on a grey sea and sky by Ruysdael will shine like a ruby, while all the reds, blues, and yellows indiscriminately shuffled together, as in most of the painted glass of the present day, will fail to produce the effect of brilliancy, and, indeed, will each destroy its neighbour. Of this principle of interdependence in the scale of his palette the true painter becomes more and more conscious; his chief art being to work it out in practice. But no similar consciousness can be attributed to unreasoning races. Therefore, for such evidences of the prevalence of fine colour as are found among

them, a different operation of the same principle must be sought.

In countries where there is much *light*, we shall invariably find rich and harmonious colouring in the costumes of men and the trappings of their animals. Much light bleaches the landscape, and for the greater part of the year, and in some localities, for the year round, the eye rests only on an arid and neutral-coloured world. This monotony renders all colour, as such, both precious and distinct. Nature sets the example by the brilliant plumage of her birds, and the hues of smaller creatures—a brilliancy never raw or crude: and Nature herself gives the materials as well as the example for the same harmonies in the accessories of human life. Eastern races have for ages been aware that only the rich and true colours supplied by their native dyes—the madders, indigos, &c., and their combinations—will stand the hot and dazzling conditions of their climate. The use of these colours has therefore become such a mere habit that the reasons

for their preference may be said to be forgotten. The selection of the fittest has been made for them by Nature herself; it being reserved for the Englishwoman in India, who ignores this law, to discover with dismay the dirty mixture to which her fresh Parisian dress in the last tint of the fashion is promptly reduced. Even in their fadings the dyes of India and Arabia—aided by the quality of the native wools which have an affinity for them—maintain their relative harmonies; and the painter will even prefer the worn rug, or robe, to the new one. Nor must we overlook another reason for richness and depth of tone, equally independent of the taste of man; namely, the use of colour as an ingredient of distinctness. Seen from afar across the neutral mass of the ocean, the brilliant hues of the ship's flag, or pennon, are no matter of mere taste or fancy, but of necessity. In the same way the robe and the turban of the traveller in the Desert, and the housings of his horse or camel, have their allotted purpose.

Thus it appears that the harmonious combinations of the Persian carpet, or Indian shawl, are hardly to be credited so much to the 'feeling for colour' of the native weaver, as to the light and heat which render all false tints fugitive, and which these combinations alone resist; the providence of Nature having also bestowed materials in which he can hardly go amiss. Not that we would deny to the Eastern weaver, who in such countries offers the only approach to the position of a painter, the exercise of taste, and that sometimes of a high kind; the result of the culture of the eye under long-continued traditional arrangement; but he moves and works, to a great extent, in a groove formed for centuries before him.

To turn now to our own land, where, far from having the light and heat and consequent neutral monotony of landscape to which we have endeavoured to trace the use of the rich colouring of the East, our native landscape presents, more or less, all the year round a mass of that colour most foreign to

the Oriental eye, and most grateful to our own; namely, that of a soft and refreshing verdure. We sigh for nothing better; nor for more harmonious correlatives than the time-worn hues of stone or brick—the grey church tower, and the old brick mansion—the neutral yellows and greys of the cornfield, whether in ear or stubble—and the ever-changing varieties of grey and luminous clouds; all of which receive a relative value from the surrounding green. Other forms of so-called 'colour,' such as masses of sparkling mosaic, patches of enamel, painted architecture, even precious marbles, are not what the prevalent tones of English landscape and sky really relieve. The lady's Indian shawl is known to be the true and choice thing by a limited jury, but, in her heart, the lady's maid thinks it a dull affair to have cost so much. For we have not light, and therefore neutral tint, enough to set it off.

That under these differing and even unfavouring conditions, English art, from the period of its revival, should have been

pre-eminent in the quality of 'colour,' may be said to be in some degree also the natural consequence of our external world. Dingy cities and gloomy skies engender the desire for mimic scenes of greater brightness. It is characteristic of modern Italian painters that they frequently choose those misty effects they seldom see—we have too much of them. To anticipate, however, a fair criticism on our argument, we are perfectly ready, while contending for the nullity of instinct for colour in races, to admit it to the utmost in individuals. A delight in colour is as natural to one man as the same in music is to another. To ask why is to reason beyond our scope. It is a matter of temperament as much as sanguineness or hopelessness are. Colourists like poets are born, not made. But the fact remains that the East has never produced a school of colourists at all in the modern sense. Mr. Gladstone's arguments go far to show that the Greeks in Homer's time did not even possess that visual organisation necessary to distinguish the 'qualita-

tive' character of colour.[1] He might have added that the very exclusiveness of the devotion of the Greek artists to Form, and their pre-eminence in it, point to the corresponding absence of feeling in the colour direction. The relics of antique pictures display a sculpturesque arrangement of fine forms, delicately tinted; but of the science of colour and chiaroscuro, as developed in Titian and Rembrandt, the antique artists would seem to have had as little idea as of the science of music as developed by Mozart. Even where Greek influence penetrated into Italy, as in Naples and in the South, no school of painting worthy the name arose. While, therefore, admitting that the French connoisseurs showed their discernment at the Paris Exhibition of 1855, by pronouncing the chief characteristic of the English pictures to be that of 'colour,' it may be safely prophesied that the supposed cultivation of this quality among us, by means of dingy paper-

[1] *The Colour Sense.* By the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P. *The Nineteenth Century*, October 1877.

hangings, gaudy painted glass—the soulless routine of Schools of Design—and Doré's pictures, will never succeed in implanting or educing a *popular* taste for this 'centre jewel of the Painter's crown.'

And now for the relative causes for the Venetian pre-eminence in this quality, to which all this theorising has been tending. Venice is not hotter in her climate, if so hot, as other centres of Italian art, and has no land to be bleached into monotony by the radiance of light that pours down upon her. Other causes, however, have surrounded her with those cool and neutral tints which give value to all the warmer scale. Whoever, with a reasoning eye, has had the privilege of using it in Venice is made aware how largely that glorious tide of exquisitely coloured salt water, which surges backwards and forwards through her every vein and artery, is accountable for the brilliancy and distinctness of all objects near and upon it. The lichen-grown, time-stained, and salt-rusted palaces which sparkle as with an

inner light, and throw reflections more brilliant than themselves on the quivering waters beneath, would be deprived of half their lustre did they stand on dry land. By the same rule, too, the rusty black gondola—absolutely brown, though relatively black—and all the soiled and common crafts, carrying the daily uses of a great city, that glide on the bosom of the grand canal, are tenfold more distinct to the eye than the most gorgeous of Lord Mayor's coaches that ever jolted through High Holborn.

Nowhere, in short, does the artist imbibe such direct lessons on the causes of colour and of distinctness of effect than in the salt-water streets of this unique city. As the first fruits of this teaching we may venture to point to the rich character of the Venetian glass, unrivalled already by the end of the thirteenth century; what the Republic, in point of commercial importance, called 'the pupil of her eye,' and scarcely less important in the sense of art. In the isolation and activity of the Venetian people this manu-

facture would seem to have partially engrossed and satisfied the native demand for richly coloured ornament. For it is remarkable how comparatively slow they were in catching the infection of that purely pictorial art, which had spread like a wild flower through the chief cities of Italy. The fetters of Byzantine prescription, as regards religious art, nowhere seen in grander forms than in the mysterious temple of S. Marco, hung longer in Venice than elsewhere. In vain did Giotto reign supreme from north to south of the Peninsula; in vain were some of his finest works executed as near as Padua; no trace of his influence is found in Venice. His best pupil, and that pupil's son, Taddeo and Agnolo Gaddi, resided even in Venice for some time; but, curious to say, they ceased to be painters there, and turned into merchants. Venetian art is in this respect exceptional, that it did not pass through the usual preliminary stages of the Renaissance. No timid stirrings of spiritual feeling in tempera have remained; no grand frescoed

scenes decorate the ample walls of her stately churches; but when the dawn of native art finally broke, its earliest rays woke up a realm of colour.

To return, therefore, to the peculiar material conditions of Venice, it is to them, and not to the contact with the East, that may be attributed those features of the art which burst at once into being—richness of colour and distinctness of effect—which are traceable through the Vivarini, Carpaccio, and Gian Bellini, up to the perfection of their development in the person of Titian.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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